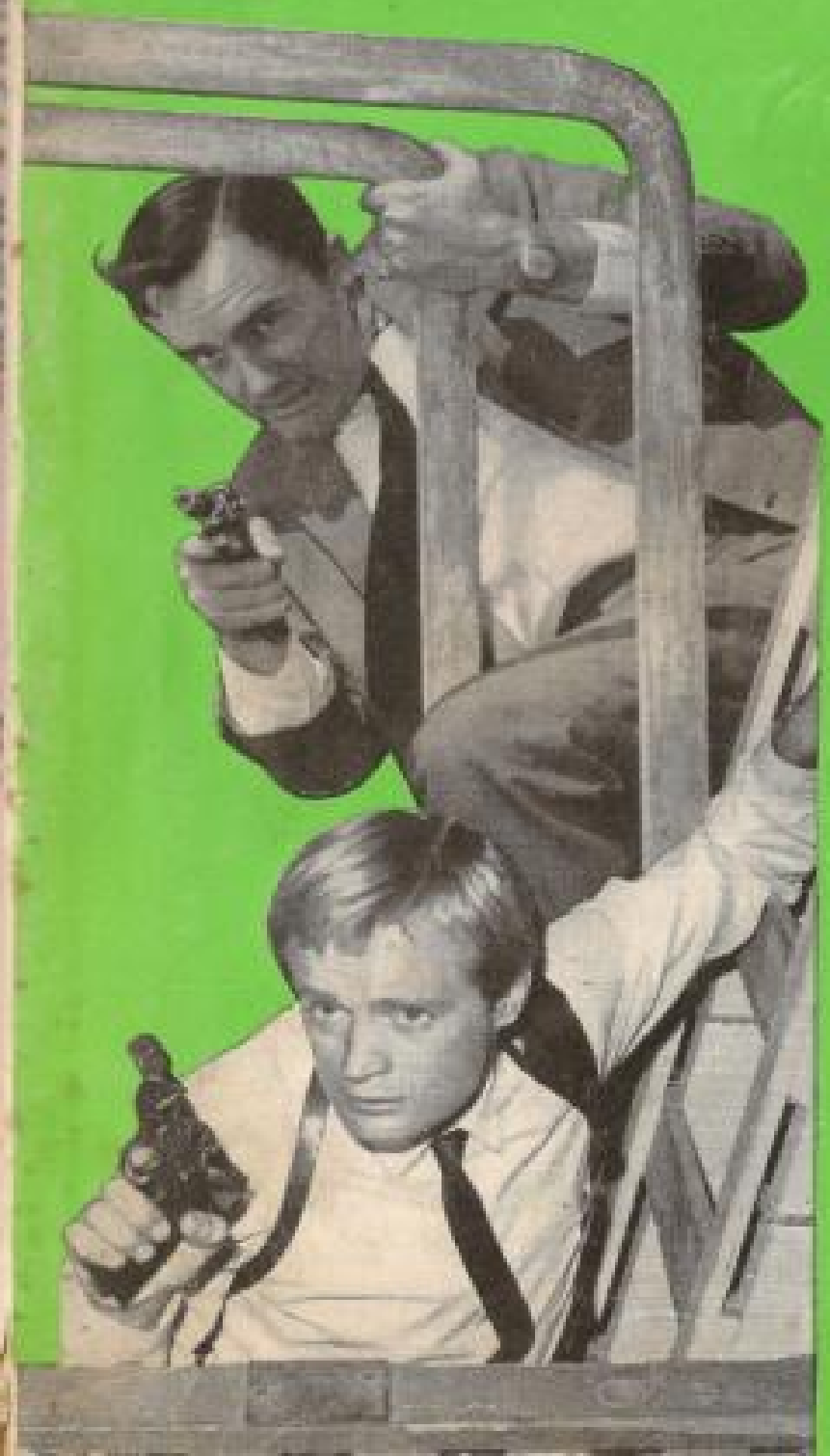
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 50c PDC



NAPOLEON SOLO ILLYA KURYAKIN

Alone, they face Thrush's Empire of Evil—a devil-made tidal wave which can engulf the world! □ □ □ □ □ □

THE MOBY DICK AFFAIR

An U.N.C.L.E. novel of strange terror by

ROBERT HART DAVIS

Also: **NORMAN DANIELS**
THEODORE STURGEON
ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

THE MOBY DICK AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

In the sea… in the clouds… cunningly and well had THRUSH spawned their seeds of evil, as Napoleon and Illya combed panic-stricken London to find the key to the most satanic murder device ever to menace U.N.C.L.E.—a man-made tidal wave which could drown the world.

PROLOGUE

"—AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK"

THE ONLY color in all of the threatening gray world came spurting orange from the power pods on each wing of the jet sea plane. And the mood of Napoleon Solo exactly suited the somberness in which they were flying, at what seemed an irritatingly slow pace for so important a mission.

Solo's index and middle finger, right hand, smarted suddenly. The cigarette he'd been smoking had nearly burned down to the filter. Startled, he dropped it, shooting to his feet from the jump seat behind the co-pilot's in the cockpit.

The smoldering butt rolled for ward toward the instruments. Their pilot, Masters, a sallow Scot, spotted the little rolling cylinder.

"Put that thing out, for the Lord's sweet sake," he said. "Kuryakin? Someone!"

Solo rubbed his hand on the right leg of his flight suit. Seated just ahead of him in the co-pilot's chair, Illya Kuryakin slid his left boot over and used the ridged soles to extinguish the last wisp of smoke. Solo sucked his index finger.

"I know U.N.C.L.E.'s pilot squadron has high health standards," Illya said. "But don't you think you're carrying it a bit far, Masters?"

Masters swiped at his drooping mustache, muttered, "Extreme fire hazard. Special fuels and all."

"Oh," Illya said. "That explains it." His glance back over his shoulder at Napoleon Solo implied that it did not explain it.

Precisely the opposite.

Solo was angry with himself for allowing the minor burn to divert his attention, even momentarily, from the circular frosted display glass on the futuristic-looking for ward wall of the cockpit. Though it was noon by the clock, they were flying through cloud. They had been since leaving the Shetland Islands behind, some twenty minutes ago. The cockpit was gloomy. Concentric yellow circles glowed on the display glass. Solo bent between the men in the twin front seats, alarmed.

He pointed. "Masters, I thought you were locked on. We've lost the blip."

Masters grunted, threw a couple of selector knobs.

"Gone, all right."

"Masters," Illya said, "don't be so casual. We must catch that THRUSH helicopter. It's imperative that we forestall Dr. Shelley's capture by the enemy."

Solo winced. "Always understating it. Shelley has already been captured. Kidnapped is the right term. Due, you'll recall, to the delay we encountered trying to get through London traffic, once the informant confessed."

"Thirty seconds," Illya said softly. "It can encompass a lifetime."

Solo said, "Listen, Masters, what do we do? We've lost them."

Masters snuffled. "Doing the best I can. Frankly, you chaps from Operations and Enforcement always expect miracles. We were lucky we

had this craft available at London at all. We were lucky that the THRUSH helicopter which carried off this Shelley fellow apparently was only a transfer vehicle, otherwise we'd never even have caught the signal from British Air Defense that enabled us to pick them up."

"I wouldn't say we were expecting miracles, Masters." Solo felt testy. "I'd say we were expecting that a THRUSH jet helicopter could be caught by an U.N.C.L.E. jet seaplane which, unless I'm mistaken, is theoretically faster."

Ahead, past the windshield, tattery gray clouds whipped at them. The cockpit smelled of metal and fuel. The stink of tension rose in Solo's nostrils. Suddenly through the scud coming at them with ex press-train speed, a ragged swatch of dull gray-blue appeared. Solo craned forward. The power pods whistled and the seaplane burst from the low-hanging clouds.

Below them rolled the cold metallic, waters of the North Sea, uniformly stretching to the horizons except at one point ahead and slightly to port. There, the outcrops of several small rocky islands pushed up through whitecaps. Over this cluster of islands a black dot hung and then slowly lowered.

Solo clapped Masters on the shoulder: "There they are. Landing. They must be expecting a pickup."

The U.N.C.L.E. agent was suddenly aware of Masters' response to the gloved slap of enthusiasm. Inside his flying suit, Masters had gone stiff.

His head jerked around sharply. Before he turned back forward to the controls, Solo saw sickly yellow reflections from the display glass shining in the man's watering eyes.

Solo decided that Masters disliked him. Unusual. Strictly the exception for an organization with the high morale U.N.C.L.E. enjoyed.

Or was he overreacting? Solo wondered about it as the seaplane closed the distance to the rocky island. The stakes were extremely high—

They stood to make a double bag if they succeeded on this mission. One half of the catch was essential. That was the recovery of Dr. Artemus Shelley, the oceanographer who headed by U.N.C.L.E.'s special undersea warfare research station near Golder's Green.

The other half of the catch could be a bonus—Newsom Naglesmith. It was an unlikely enough name for a crack professional murderer. Naglesmith was a European sub-sector chief for THRUSH, with a long record of kills and assorted mayhem.

Word of a plot to kidnap Dr. Artemus Shelley had reached Solo and Illya in Edinburgh, where they were just winding up an affair which had found THRUSH packaging toxic chemicals at a small multivitamin tablet factory. The vitamins were to be shipped to the post exchanges of key military bases maintained by several important nations.

The two agents had jetted back to London, conversing briefly with Mr. Waverly while airborne. Then at London HO they had spent twenty naggingly slow minutes with the washed-up Wagnerian soprano who had been Newsom Naglesmith's latest light of love.

Several months ago, it seemed, Naglesmith had grown a whit careless while drinking vintage champagne. He'd babbled to her of the impending plot to ferret Dr. Shelley away.

A lover's quarrel just yesterday had resulted in the poor soprano being bounced out of Naglesmith's life forever. Tipsy with gin, the lady had reeled into a police station, incoherently wailing about the plot, and about dear Newsom being wrought up because of his impending "situation," as he referred to acts of violence on behalf of THRUSH.

Naglesmith's name was relayed to C.I.D., thence to U.N.C.L.E. While the lady was still under sedative, resident agents plied her with other effective but basically harmless drugs, thereby draining her psyche of a few concrete details about the planned Shelley kidnap.

Deduction from the details: Naglesmith was wrought up because the time for an important "situation" had arrived, and it stood a good chance of being

the Dr. Shelley lift. Solo and Illya were signaled on an emergency call and got into the London traffic jam after leaving HO.

They arrived at the laboratory just in time to see the THRUSH transfer copter winging away. With the aid of the British Air Force, they'd picked up the trail at sea an hour later, Masters their pilot.

Illya Kuryakin was thumbing through his little book. Solo's nerves were stretched to the limit. They were closing on the rocky islands, each outcrop of stone assuming definition in the sea. Masters had both flight gloves on the control levers. Abruptly Solo reached past him.

"What the devil are you doing, Solo?"

Flick, flick, Solo twisted red levers.

"Your job. Getting the anti-personnel rockets ready. We don't know what kind of reinforcements THRUSH has on those islands."

"Their 'copter is out of sight now," Illya said. Solo hadn't even seen him glance up.

Masters licked his lips. Sweat popped on his brow. A drop rolled down and sat on the tip of his nose.

"Shouldn't we radio for help?" he asked.

Solo couldn't help himself:

"What do you use for backbone, Masters? Jello?"

The yellow dash-glare shone again in Masters' eyes. "That wasn't a prudent thing to say."

Illya snapped his small book shut. "Not prudent, perhaps. But precisely right. Napoleon, the behavior of Mr. Masters on this flight can be described by only one word. Reluctant."

Suddenly Illya's hand went out of sight. When it re-appeared, the fingers were dwarfed by the massive blackness of the long-muzzle U.N.C.L.E. pistol.

"This seaplane is not underpowered, Mr. Masters," he said. "It is you who are underpowered. You lack ambition to catch THRUSH at its dirty work. I suggest you take the controls, Napoleon. Mr. Masters was fearful of your cigarette. He pleaded exotic fuels aboard.

"I always carry my little pamphlet on U.N.C.L.E. operating equipment. I was leafing through it just now. This type of plane operates on standard fuel. We are quite explosion-proof here in the cock pit. Unless, of course—" Illya Kuryakin jabbed the muzzle nearer Masters' face—"there is some other explosion hazard we don't know about."

All at once Masters seemed to acquire character. He threw his head back and laughed.

"Get out of there, you miserable traitor," Solo shouted. He grabbed the fur collar of Masters' flying suit.

Masters clubbed at him hard. Napoleon Solo took a blow on the temple. He went crashing back against instrument dials on the rear cockpit wall.

With his left hand Masters reached beneath his seat and gave a twist.

"There! Now I've armed the little darling—" He batted savagely at Illya's pistol with his fist.

Illya's right hand was driven up. The pistol blammed. A big ragged hole appeared in the cockpit roof. Wind screamed.

From somewhere Masters produced a heavy spanner. He cracked Illya across the bridge of the nose with it. Then, face contorted with fanatic fury, he twisted up out of his bucket seat. His leg accidentally kicked one of the control levers. The seaplane's nose jerked up into a steep climb.

Wind whipped and tore at Solo's face as he fought for balance. The plane's upward tilt threw Masters at him, hacking air with the spanner. Solo ducked and darted between Masters' legs as the pilot's hard blow connected.

Had it connected with Solo's skull, that would have been all. As it was, Masters had swung violently and the spanner head crashed through the tin outer metal shell of the instrument panel on the rear wall.

Glass shattered. Ripped wires spurted green sparks. The spanner in Masters' hand became a conductor of powerful currents. The flight glove was of little help as insulation. Masters' backbone arched. He shrieked, trying to stand taller than he was as electricity shot through his body.

Then he dropped, crisped.

Smoke swirled in the cockpit now. Solo crawled groggily into the pilot's seat. Sparks hit him on the back of the neck, burning his skin. He thought he heard ticking but that was impossible. The wind was screaming through the shot-out cockpit roof too loudly.

Had the roof control tracks been damaged? If they had, he and Illya, who was muzzily shaking his head, would be marmalade or worse as soon as he tripped the lever—

"Hang on," Solo yelled. "I'm going to blow the ejector."

"I preferred Edinburgh," Illya yelled back. "Scottish lasses, Scottish whiskey—"

Solo hammered the ejection lever and knew a moment of exquisite horror. Nothing happened.

But his own senses had stretched a split second into an eternity. There was a thunder, a sense of lifting, of shooting straight at the cockpit roof.

Good-bye, skull, Solo thought. Then he was rocketing up into gray-blue sky.

He shot up and up like a projectile. The remains of the ejection seat dropped away beneath. A ferocious blam hurt his ears and sent black smoke balls writhing across his vision. The seaplane had gone up.

Solo began to drop. The horizon spun over and over. Finally, when he was dropping like a stone and thought he had the sea and sky in their proper places, he yanked the ring. With a crack and a tear at his armpits, the chute opened.

He twisted his head. Silk bloomed several hundred yards above and to his right. Illya bobbed like a doll at the end of his shrouds. He kicked a boot to indicate he was all right.

On the way down Solo had only a swift glimpse of the nearest island. The THRUSH jet 'copter had landed on its far side. In all the island was not more than several hundred yards across, but it was bisected by an uneven ridge. Atop this ridge two tiny figures stood silhouetted now. They were out of pistol or rifle range. That was both a blessing and a burden. Time might be short.

With a huge splash, Solo settled into the icy sea. He struggled and snorted and flicked the inflating switches on the legs of his suit. Soon he paddled out from under the soggy silk of his chute. From the neck down he resembled the circus fat lady.

An equally bulbous shape with Illya's head on top floated a dozen yards off. Solo paddled toward it. Illya squirted a spout of water out of his mouth.

"I saw two of them," Solo panted, indicating the island. "One might have been Shelley."

"Two against two isn't bad," Illya said. "Of course they've seen us too."

Squinting into the light haze which lay on the surface of the sea, Napoleon Solo nodded.

Neither of the U.N.C.L.E. agents needed more words with the other. They'd worked long as a team, knew what must be done, appreciated the perilous

shortness of time just now. Naglesmith might have arranged his pickup on a split-second schedule. A nuclear-powered THRUSH powerboat could appear on the horizon and reach the island before Solo and Illya succeeded in swimming halfway there.

Shock and pain had already conspired to put a weight of fatigue on Napoleon Solo. He tried to forget it all. He deflated his suit to the proper level to give his stroke maximum efficiency. Then, icy water slashing at his head, he began to swim.

He drew within fifty feet of the island's rough beach. He heard a flat report. A geyser of water leaped up inches from his head. From atop the ridge, Newsom Naglesmith had found the range.

Solo poured on the speed. Another gunshot. This time the echo said the shot was directed at Illya, approaching the island's far side. Solo swam like a madman, filling and emptying his lungs with savage force.

Naglesmith fired in his direction again. The bullet ripped a slash in his left sleeve. Solo's knees crunched gravel.

He staggered up the rocky beach and floundered out flat behind a big boulder, a portion of which was chipped away by Naglesmith's next bullet. A flying bit of stone nicked his right eyeball, bringing intense pain and momentary blindness.

Hastily unzipping his right suit leg, Solo took out his own long-muzzle pistol. He snapped a range extender over the end to make it even longer. Then he dragged him self upright.

He peered from behind the rock. Up above him the ridge was jaggedly cruel as a dinosaur's spine. And empty.

Carefully Solo dodged forward to the cover of the next rock nearest the ridge base. Suddenly Naglesmith loomed into sight in a bright scarlet windproof with parka hood. His face was ugly with delight as he aimed and fired.

Solo dove and rolled frantically. The bullet ate away part of the shale where he'd stood an instant before.

Something crashed softly against the ridge rock near Naglesmith. A rock thrown by Illya Kuryakin? The THRUSH sub-sector chief twisted around and fired his pistol three times. Solo got to his feet and scrabbled wildly up the sloping side of the ridge. He could hear Illya's boots pounding from the other direction, though he could not see him.

Naglesmith let out a shrill cry of rage. His foot must have slipped. He landed on his chest, his face sticking out over the ridge edge, not six feet above the place where Solo was clinging.

Naglesmith's muddy eyes lighted with killing hunger. Solo was caught in the open, absolutely unprotected as he hung on the slope of the ridge. Naglesmith jerked his right hand forward. He aimed his automatic pistol down at Solo's damp forehead.

Solo whipped his own gun-hand up to beat Naglesmith if he could. But the swim had left his palm slippery. The pistol wriggled, slid against his skin. The muzzle dipped. The aim was disastrously wrong—

Naglesmith leaned down.

His trigger finger turned white.

Something cracked. Naglesmith exhaled, a long, startled, "Ahhhhh!" He flopped over on his back.

Solo fought for purchase on the rocky slope. Cautiously he edged upward and looked over the lip of the ridge.

In the distance the black-painted THRUSH jet 'copter stood silent in an open, relatively rock-free area. Nearer, a thin, altogether innocuous sandy-haired man of fifty or so huddled with his hands in the pockets of a raincoat two sizes too large. And just a few feet away, Illya Kuryakin slipped out from behind a large boulder.

In his hand he held his small auxiliary close-range weapon. The zipper on his left suit leg was open; he'd gotten it out of there. He'd lost his regular pistol in the plane.

Illya stared down, his face devoid of expression, his bangs a damp dark line across his forehead. Newsom Naglesmith lay with one arm crooked under his face. His back showed a darkish widening stain where Illya's bullet had pierced the scarlet windproof fabric directly below the left shoulder blade.

"Stop mumbling," Solo said. "And thanks for the assist."

"You're welcome. And I'm not mumbling."

Solo jumped forward then, using his boot toe to lift Naglesmith's chest and flip him over.

The THRUSH agent groaned. His teeth were clenched. His face was formed into a hideous, glare-eyed expression of pleasure. And Napoleon Solo saw that a false face on Naglesmith's watch stood upright at a 90 degree angle from the real face, which incorporated a small transmitter unit of familiar design.

Solo bent, tore the bogus wristwatch off Naglesmith's arm. Illya raced up.

"How long has he been talking on that thing, Napoleon?"

"Long—quite long—enough," Naglesmith said. His puffy face convulsed into what could only be called black humor. A dying man's humor. His eyes seemed to grow very large. "Quite long enough to signal—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen—look!"

The reedy voice belonged to Dr. Artemus Shelley. He was flapping his arms and pointing wildly off the coast of the island. Solo turned.

An ominous rumbling filled the air. Both Solo and Illya gaped in horror.

A gigantic wall of foaming water had risen in the space of three heartbeats, from the surface of the ocean.

Solo couldn't believe the evidence of his eyes. The monstrous tidal wave reached higher, higher, cresting up and up with every passing second, flying at the tiny island with incredible speed.

Out of nowhere it had come. And now it foamed and thundered straight at them, twice as wide as the rocky little island and four times as high.

It seethed, it roared like thunder, it crashed—

And over it all sounded Naglesmith's hysterical laughing.

ACT I

WHITE WHALES AND PINK POISON

NAPOLEON SOLO was not a man to expend effort on ceremony. He did not bother to inquire whether Thrushman Naglesmith wished to be evacuated. A dousing spray from the tidal wave was already trickling down his neck as he signaled Illya with a quick nod. Illya at the head, Solo at the feet, the U.N.C.L:E. agents bent to lift their prisoner.

Beneath their boots the little island quaked. Over his shoulder Solo glimpsed the mountainous gray water-wall rising and rising. When it finally splashed over upon them, it would do so with a billion-ton force. Nothing would be left. Solo grabbed the ankles of Naglesmith's boots.

For his pains he got a vicious kick under the point of his chin. Though wounded critically or fatally, Naglesmith had strength left. He cracked Illya Kuryakin's cheek with a flailing elbow and began to scrabble away.

"You worthless fool!" Illya shouted. "Unless we get you into that 'copter, you're finished."

The words could barely be heard above the grinding, rumbling sea roar. Naglesmith kept crawling away from them. Solo saw the man's danger, pointed. He flapped his arms, ran forward shouting. The sea-thunder drowned him out.

Naglesmith's cheeks blanched; all at once as he realized there was nothing in back of him. With a squeal of fright he half skidded, half fell into a narrow crevasse. When Solo and Illya reached him his whole body below his rib cage was wedged tightly underground.

They grabbed his arms. They tugged, swore. Water pelted them in heavy sheets. Naglesmith's face had acquired a wild look. Seawater streamed over his cheeks. He knew he couldn't be pulled free. Somehow he didn't seem to care.

Solo glanced uneasily back. His belly churned at the sight of the fantastic tidal wave nearing the island. Dr. Artemus Shelley was running back and forth next to the THRUSH 'copter, obviously terrified that they wouldn't escape.

"We have to leave him," Solo mouthed the words. Illya, drenched, nodded.

"Go on, go on!" Naglesmith yelled, with such maniacal lungpower that the U.N.C.L.E. agents could hear something of what he was screaming. "Go on, run, yellowbellies. Run while you can. THRUSH has the secret. We'll squeeze the world's throat and the world will surrender! Go on, you ridiculous cretins; save yourselves for a few more days. But beware Project Ahab."

Naglesmith was shrieking in the mindless abandon of a man doomed. "*Beware Project Ahab, you*—" He howled foul, hateful names.

Napoleon Solo had as few scruples about the enemy as the next U.N.C.L.E. operative. Perhaps fewer. Yet he still rebelled at the idea of leaving a human being to die. Illya dragged his arm, signaling some trouble more immediate than the tidal wave. Solo spun around.

Dr. Artemus Shelley lay sprawled on the rock below the open hatch of the THUSH 'copter, unmoving.

Dr. Shelley had apparently been trying to climb into the machine. Damp footprints showed around the hatch edges. Solo raced for the 'copter, mind made up. In all the graying darkness of the nightmare, one blob of color

leaped out, a bright crimson smear on the fallen man's forehead. Dr. Shelley had struck his temple on a sharp stone.

"Can you fly this thing?" Solo bawled as he and Illya fought the battering wind.

"If there is the usual simplified THRUSH manual on board."

"That's what I like," Solo yelled. "Confidence."

"—beware, beware," came the gibbering voice of Naglesmith, shredded into snatches by the roar of wind and water. "—beware the white whale, you despicable, crawling sons of Solo and Illya picked up Dr. Shelley, lifted him inside the 'copter hatch as Swiftly and —" More verbal filth, mercifully blown away by the noise.

Solo and Illya picked up Dr. Shelley, lifted him inside the 'copter hatch as swiftly and gingerly as possible. Solo gave Illya a boost, then leaped up himself. He slammed the hatch and dogged it down just as the first down-pourings of the cresting tidal wave struck the island.

"All burners active," Illya called turn the cockpit. "Now if we can only get lift—"

The 'copter's roof sounded as though a ton of pebbles rained on it. Counterpointing this came the thin whine of the turbines. Solo crouched on the damp ribbed floor beside the lightly-breathing Dr. Shelley. He felt the 'copter shudder, strain as more and more water poured down, a torrent of water, a thunder of water that hammered his ears pitilessly. Suddenly, there was lift.

"We're up," Illya called from in hunt. "Up, but not out."

Nothing could be seen through the cockpit glass except streaming torrents of gray-green water. The 'copter began to lurch and pitch. Illya fought the controls. Using his knees, Solo tried to brace Shelley's body against one wall to prevent additional serious injury. The wound on Shelley's temple had slowed its flow. But a dark, sinister bruise was forming.

Illya Kuryakin was wrenching the control rods and levers back and forth, adjusting the pitch every second as the rotors sought to lift the craft up and away from the torrent.

The jet 'copter shuddered another time. Metal whanged. Insulated cables broke loose from the wall, lashed wildly. Solo was thinking up a prayer. He figured it would need to be brief if he was to get it all in. The 'copter gave one last awful buck and pitch, then went zooming upward with a speed that almost dislocated Napoleon Solo's stomach.

Panting, Solo crawled into the cockpit seat beside Illya. The jet 'copter was lifting smoothly into the slate, blue sky. They had pulled up through the worst. Solo ran his moist tongue over strangely parched lips.

Illya banked the 'copter. Out the window to port Solo saw an awful sight. There was a boiling cauldron of white water where the tidal wave had collapsed upon itself, a foaming area of churning fury nearly a mile wide. Nothing of the rocky island, nor any of its nearby companion islands remained.

"Such tidal waves are an oceanographic impossibility," Illya breathed, as if to convince himself of the truth of those words.

"That's nice," Solo said. "I'm really asleep in the hotel in London, having nightmares?"

"Let us sincerely hope that's it, Napoleon. Otherwise THRUSH has scored a march. Tidal waves do not simply generate themselves spontaneously, in seconds."

Solo tried to push the gnawing fact out of his mind. From where had the wave come? Naglesmith had given some sort of signal. But to what? To whom?

"Shelley's seriously injured," Solo said, jarred back to matters of the moment. "Try to cram more speed into those chopper blades. We'll land on the seacoast and radio for a paramedical squad to meet us." He felt exhausted, thick witted. Dr. Shelley hardly stirred on the wet cabin floor.

As Illya piloted the 'copter away from the maelstrom, Solo watched it drop behind. He licked his lips again. His expression grew stark as he gazed out over the ocean at the devastation still bubbling whitely back there. Cold sweat slicked his face.

Illya glanced over. "What are you thinking, Napoleon?"

In a croak, all Solo could manage to reply was, "Well, actually—I'm thirsty."

TWO

BEWARE THE white whale?" said Mr. Alexander Waverly.

"That's what the man said," replied Napoleon Solo.

A raised eyebrow from Mr. Waverly. "Project Ahab?"

Up went Solo's right hand, Scout-honor sign. "Illya heard it too."

Illya Kuryakin had his slippered feet up on an ottoman before the fire in the grate. Both he and Solo, twenty-four hours after their encounter with the bizarre tidal wave, looked somewhat gritty around the eyes but otherwise not much worse for the experience. Their scars were mostly on the inside.

The paramedical plane had flown Dr. Shelley and the two agents swiftly to London. U.N.C.L.E.'s oceanography expert was now in a London hospital, the victim of a severe concussion. He had fallen into a coma. Both agents had managed to catch about an hour's sleep apiece before the arrival of Mr. Waverly, via transatlantic jet, in response to their signal to New York that something large-scale and fishy was up.

Pondering, Mr. Waverly strolled to the window. He tapped his empty pipe against the sill. Outside, though it was midafternoon, fog lamps gleamed on the Thames Embankment. Chimes rang somewhere.

This conference room, a part of the U.N.C.L.E. London complex, was decorated in Victorian style. The only jarring note was the recessed bank of signal lights in the ceiling. Things were quiet. Only two lights flashed, one a standard blue showed that all security circuits surrounding the building's perimeter were operating correctly, and another, an intermittent orange flash, indicated cable traffic coming in from overseas.

"I don't know what to make of it." Mr. Waverly sighed. "I'd say it calls for an answer from a student of literature, or a psychiatrist, or both. Obviously, gentlemen, Naglesmith must have become mentally unstable when he realized he would die on the island."

"That's the easiest explanation." Illya did not sound convinced.

"Unfortunately it also is too simple for us to enjoy the luxury of adopting it," Waverly replied.

"Besides," Solo said, "we saw the evidence. Felt it. That tidal wave."

"A double hallucination is out of the question," Illya said.

"Um, quite right, quite right." Mr. Waverly sucked noisily at the cold briar. "Unfortunately we are faced with a dilemma. THRUSH may have succeeded in harnessing the tremendous destructive energy of the sea. But we are balked just there. We cannot question the one witness who might put us onto the right route of inquiry. Dr. Artemus Shelley's condition is not terminal. On the other hand, the physicians aren't certain just exactly how soon he'll come out of the coma."

Waverly consulted a gleaming gold wristwatch. "Perhaps I might check again, though—"

As the chief of one of the five sections of U.N.C.L.E.'s top level Policy and Operations division, Mr. Waverly showed his burdens in the slope of his shoulders and the pouches beneath his eyes. But he bore the burdens with dignity. As he walked across the carpet, he might have been starting out to pick up the phone to call his tailor.

Flopped into a huge and supremely comfortable easy chair which ministered to his assorted aches very nicely, Solo peered through two fingers of his left hand, which was propped under his chin. He'd had to run out and buy a top coat for the trip to the airport to meet Waverly. He kept recalling the saucy little girl who had waited on him. The girl had a pert, fetching figure, a charming Cockney accent, and an easy to recall phone number.

Too bad.

There was an air of tension in the room, born of frustration. Illya sat up. "Beg your pardon, sir, but Napoleon and I still don't know exactly what role Dr. Shelley plays in all this. What does he really do for us?"

Waverly turned. "Didn't I cover that? Forgive me. My mind's been a lot overworked in this affair."

"We didn't see illusions," said Solo. "That was certified water. A mountain."

Waverly said, "Project Ahab. It of course refers to Melville's magnificent book about the white whale, *Moby Dick*. Captain Ahab was the whaling vessel's maniacal captain dedicated to the whale's pursuit. Now the only context into which I can put the words Project Ahab is one which includes—no, no, it won't do. We had a report two and a half years ago that he went down in a THRUSH weapons bathysphere off Rio."

Memory surged back to Solo then. "Of course. Commander Victor Ahab."

"The THRUSH naval strategist," Illya said. "But wasn't he—well, crazy?"

Waverly gave an emphatic nod. "Mad as a coot. Like his novelistic counterpart. Never ran up against him personally. Our lads said he was a deadly adversary. Lunatics often are, as we know."

Waverly went on:

"There have been instances when THRUSH tagged one of its top people for a long range project, then staged an ersatz death or disappearance to allow

the person to operate at maximum efficiency behind the fiction of being dead. We might be confronted with such a situation here. Of course we're still stuck on the thorn of what the devil THRUSH and Victor Ahab, if it is Victor Ahab, are up to."

"I need a drink," Solo announced. He pulled a bell rope. Soon an operative entered.

The man was the soul of politeness, a dignified gentleman of middle years dressed in butler's swallowtail. The triangular U.N.C.L.E. badge hung from his front pocket.

Napoleon Solo poured himself a jot of brandy from the decanter the man set down. Waverly was staring thoughtfully at a Gainsborough above the mantle.

Illya Kuryakin coughed. "The matter of Dr. Shelley, sir. What he does for U.N.C.L.E. Perhaps it would contain a clue—"

"Oh—sorry." Mr. Waverly refocused his attention. "Dr. Shelley. Afraid I can't be of much help there. I've seen descriptions of his work in his budget requests, but I'm not the technical type. Something to do with research into currents and tides around the world.

"I gather his research is basic rather than applied. Long term yields and all that, rather than some sort of sensational new diving suit we could use in our daily work. Frankly, Dr. Shelley would be our best authority if he were conscious. I'm regretful that we may have slipped up here, gentlemen, because evidently THRUSH holds Dr. Shelley and his work in higher regard than some of us at U.N.C.L.E. did."

Mr. Waverly picked up the receiver. Solo fidgeted in his chair. The memory of the tidal wave bothered him with what it might signify in the way of a THRUSH breakthrough.

Mr. Waverly murmured and clucked into the mouthpiece. Finally he hung up. The room had filled with the gloom of late afternoon. Yellow lamps

shown like phantom eyes on the Embankment. A log fell on the fire, suffusing the room with a woody fragrance.

"We're in luck, gentlemen," Waverly announced. "Dr. Shelley is not entirely out of danger, but when I stressed the urgency of the situation, the doctors agreed that they might be able to rouse him for a few moments, no more. At least they are going to give it a try. Shall we go?"

Napoleon Solo smoothed his dark suit as he stood up. "Right now, sir?"

"Of course, right now, Mr. Solo. Have you another engagement?"

"He was just thinking about buying another topcoat," Illya grinned.

"Chasing salesgirls again, eh, Mr. Solo? Well, some of them are quite sophisticated these days, I will admit." Mr. Waverly took down a Homburg from a rack. "Try to check your romantic instincts. There are bigger catches afloat. White whales."

Solo sighed as he followed his chief out the door. "Call me Ishmael."

THREE

UNDER THE thinnest of transparent polyethylene tenting, Dr. Artemus Shelley looked like a person embalmed.

He wore a white hospital gown. His cheeks were parchment color. The heavily guarded room in St. Bride's Hospital of the Templars was filled with ominous sounds and shadows. Life-giving oxygen hissed into the tent under which Shelley lay breathing thinly. Small hooded lights shone around the baseboards, the only illumination except for a thin white pencil beam slicing down next to the bed, onto a gunmetal box with a console of dials on top.

This special sound system, carefully inserted into the tent and manned by an earphoned U.N.C.L.E. technician, was designed to make communication with Shelley as clear as possible under the circumstances. Three doctors,

gowned and masked, hovered on the bed's far side. Behind them were oxygen tanks, a network of feeder tubes running to the tent. Solo, Illya and Waverly were grouped behind the technician on this side. The gas hissed.

"Ready, sir," said the technician. He flipped a console toggle. From a speaker grid in the set came the amplified rasp of Shelley's feeble breathing.

Mr. Waverly cleared his throat behind his glove. "Thank you, Mr. Jacks." He put a small, rod-like microphone near his lips and spoke softly:

"Doctor? Doctor Shelley, this is Alexander Waverly. Policy and Operations. Simply nod if you hear me."

The pale face beneath the tenting stirred almost imperceptibly.

"Dr. Shelley," Waverly went on, "I do not want to tax you, but it's imperative that we learn whatever we can about the motives behind your kidnapping. Can you tell us anything about what you've been doing at your lab in Golder's Green? Just a word, Shelley, a word or two—where your secret files are kept? That would be enough."

Solo's nerves grated at the sudden increased rasping from the amplifier. Dr. Shelley's veined hand twitched on the white sheet covering his chest. Instantly one of the masked doctors bent to scan dials near the oxygen tanks. There was silence.

"Please, Dr. Shelley, try," Mr. Waverly whispered.

One of the doctors said, "We can't allow this for more than another minute, sir."

"Tides. Change—tides. Been studying the various—" Dr. Shelley coughed hard.

"Yes, yes, studying what?" Mr. Waverly persisted. "Tell us where to locate the records."

Abruptly Dr. Shelley seemed to start up. His eyes opened half way and into the room where the gas hissed came the harsh, grating amplified words:

"Reports—eyewitness reports.—Saw the white whale—saw the white—"

Furiously, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin spun toward the hospital room door.

A physician clad in a green nylon jumper, mask and cap had just entered, somewhat noisily. Every head turned. With a sigh Dr. Shelley folded back down onto the pillows. Outside in the corridor, several other attendants in masks were hovering.

"Sorry, chaps," murmured the new arrival. "Time for a new tank."

"He's gone under," Mr. Waverly said, eyeing the tent. "We'll have to wait a bit."

"I heard him say something about eyewitness reports of a white whale," Illya said.

Mr. Waverly took out his pipe and began fiddling with it. "Yes, he did, didn't he? For a moment there, I thought I might be mad. I can make no sense of it at all. Yet I'm sure it's very sensible in the grimmest sort of way. And we don't know. We just don't know."

In the act of ticking his pipe stem angrily against the electronic console, Mr. Waverly glanced at Solo. "Mr. Solo! Kindly get your mind off shopgirls!" He sounded tired.

"I'm not thinking about shopgirls, sir. I'm thinking that's an unusual looking nozzle at the top of that oxygen tank."

The hospital attendant heard Solo's remark. He stepped to one side, effectively blocking Solo's view of the other two attendants, who had wheeled the tank in on a rubber-tired hand cart. They were now shifting the tank gingerly onto the floor. Things, Solo felt, were happening too fast.

The tank handlers had the cylinder nearly off the cart. The first attendant was still blocking it from view. Solo walked quickly around the end of the bed. He caught a glimpse of the tank's top.

Instead of the conventional solid cap on the cylinder's tip this one seemed to be perforated metal. Perforated in a dozen or more spots—Solo had been warned by less conspicuous things in the past. His hand whipped underneath his jacket.

His fingers closed around his pistol-butt. "I think we've gotten a delivery of the wrong kind of gas—*Illya*!" He called it out sharply and dragged his pistol free.

The two attendants handling the cart gave it a jerk. The cylinder tipped. The first attendant jumped to catch it. He pressed the cylinder's wall. A small panel sprang open. The man reached in, twisted a lever. Pinkish colored gas that smelled of cinnamon began to spray from the nozzle-holes in the cap.

All this took barely seconds. At the same time the cart handlers whipped the cart around, gave it a shove at Solo and let go.

The heavy metal caught him in the shins, knocking him off balance. Solo had to wrench and twist hard to keep from falling against the bed. Other men in green jumpers and masks clogged the doorway. The three regular physicians stumbled over themselves in confusion.

"A THRUSH infiltration team, Mr. Waverly," Illya barked. "Get down!"

One of the attendants by the tank had drawn a gun. Twisting and still off balance, Napoleon Solo got a shot away. It made a flat, popping sound. The man jerked up on his heels and fell forward, his face passing through the cloud of pinkish gas beginning to envelop that side of the room.

As soon as the man got a substantial whiff of the stuff, his cheeks began to blacken. He slammed down on the floor, dead.

The trio of regular doctors had crouched down behind the bed. Three more green-jumpered killers were in the room, making a total of five Thrushmen on the scene. Every one had a pistol out.

Illya Kuryakin rolled prone under the bed, and fired at a pair of legs against the far wall. Another Thrushman went down.

Mr. Waverly had sought cover behind a heavy metal bureau. The pinkish gas was spreading rapidly. Solo was already a trifle dizzy. He dodged back away from it. The cinnamon tang was tantalizingly, seductively pleasant. Another of the THRUSH killers craned around the end of the bed. Aiming, he accidentally inhaled a draught of the pink cloud.

The man's eyes bulged. His tongue shot out as though it were on a spring.

His cheeks darkened and he sprawled and died.

Napoleon Solo was aware of his vulnerability in trying to crouch and fire in the open. His only advantage was the dimness of the room. A THRUSH man by the door shot at him. The bullet bit a hole in the metal bed post near Solo's head. On one knee Solo squeezed his trigger. Hit, the THRUSH agent went spilling backwards into the hall, knocking over his companion.

As the second man struggled to fight his way out from underneath the corpse, Illya darted over to the door. He shot the floundering man three times.

In the corridor alarm bells bonged. Footsteps slapped. A nurse shrieked suddenly. It was a nightmare fight, the pistols popping with a ghastly softness. Solo peered up over the end of the bed, through the tenting. Something glittered on the other side—glittered and came flashing and slashing down at the thin polyethylene guarding Shelley's life.

Solo flung himself forward on his belly. He skidded past the end of the bed, rolled on his right side and fired to his left all in one swift moment.

He missed.

The first attendant, mask fallen off to reveal a florid Middle European face, had the knife. He meant to slash the tent so that the pinkish gas could creep in. The gas was settling. Solo only had a foot or two of air space in which to breathe as he got off his second shot.

The attendant's skin was blackening from the neck upward. But he was frantically determined to score with the blade. Solo's shot spun him halfway

around.

Still the man's knife arm refused to go limp. The shining tip of the weapon flirted toward the polyethylene, driven by a spasm of the dying man's will. Through the pinkish gas Solo aimed at the bridge of the man's nose and pulled the trigger.

The knife tip was less than an inch from the plastic shroud as the bullet drove up into the THRUSH assassin's skull and drove him back against the wall.

Two of the doctors had stumbled to their feet. Mr. Waverly was shouting, "Get Shelley out of here at once!"

"It's too risky to lift him," one of the doctors exclaimed.

"Clear the hall out there!" Solo yelled, gesturing. He had a football-shaped pellet in his hand. He flung it at the corridor wall, ducked.

There was a shattering rap of sound, a burst of fire and more smoke, this time whitish. But half the corridor wall had dissolved in to a mess of lath and plaster. There was now an opening large enough to roll Dr. Shelley's entire bed through.

With Illya and Mr. Waverly and Solo and the doctors all working at it, they got the bed out and rolling along the corridor to the elevator. By that time virtually half the hospital staff had arrived.

Solo shook his head to clear it. Then he and Illya began issuing rapid orders.

Because the pinkish gas traveled slowly, they were able to evacuate the entire floor successfully. Patients were wheeled or helped into the huge elevators. Then the fire doors at either end were sealed.

Dr. Artemus Shelley was still alive and apparently had been done no further injury, according to the doctors who checked him over on the next floor below.

The U.N.C.L.E. chemical counteraction squad summoned by Mr. Waverly slipped up the fire stairs like so many glass-faced, asbestos-suited ghosts, to damp the cylinder of lethal gas.

FOUR

THE NAME of the club was The Rocker Shop, though there were no patrons present who could classify as rockers by virtue of leather apparel, hostile sneers, or tire chains at the ready.

An executive at London HO had recommended it as an excellent place for a mixed grille and a few ales, if you could stand the floor show. This consisted of an unending sequence of music hall turns. The acts appeared on a tiny stage.

A brittle flow of Establishment talk clipped back and forth in the air over the tiny tables. The only illumination in the smoky hole came from a few weak bar lights, from the baby spots aimed at the stage, and from electric candles inside tinny holders on each table. Napoleon Solo forgot to applaud as a juggler gave way to a howling, electrified teenage musical group.

A sign at the side of the stage announced the group as The Costermongers. None of the well-groomed, upper-class guests paid much attention. Solo downed some more ale, then pushed aside the remains of his mixed grille. He eyed the crowd.

"Solo in Soho. With you instead of that shopgirl. What a come down."

Illya rolled up his napkin. "Hold your temper, Napoleon. Our uncle from New York sent us out to think after we got our bellies comfortably full, not to entertain ourselves. Do you feel the same way I do?"

"How's that?" Solo asked as The Costermongers howled and twanged away ferociously.

"Not in the least eager to conduct strategy talks, for the simple reason that I am completely out of ideas about our next move."

"You're not the only one. About the only thing we can do is visit Shelley's lab in Golder's Green to night. According to the doctors, Shelley isn't going to be able to stand the shock of another revival for at least twenty-four hours. I have the unpleasant feeling that while we spin our wheels, THRUSH is gaining ground."

Illya stared rather apathetically into his water glass. "Sad but true. Well—as long as we're on expense account, perhaps I'll break my habit and indulge myself." He rose. "Excuse me, Napoleon. I'm going to try to locate a one dollar cigar. While I'm gone, try to think about Project Ahab. Come up with some thing original."

"Go get yourself a Beatle cut," said his friend with some distemper.

"But I already have one."

Illya vanished into the gloom. Solo called for another ale. The Costermongers finished their act, smiling and bowing like marionettes. Still no one seemed interested.

Solo perked up as a rather svelte young lady in a gold evening gown came onstage. A new placard by the side of the stage read, *Cleo St. Cloud, Mistress of Mentalism*. Solo toyed with the notion of asking her to read a few dozen THRUSH brains as a clue to what was in works in the way of a plot. He watched her twenty-minute turn with some interest.

Miss St. Cloud had liltingly upturned greenish eyes and a smooth delivery. She began by selecting several reluctant volunteers from the audience. She subjected them to a hypnotism susceptibility test, had them lace their fingers together with arms extended in front of the head. After appropriate syrup voiced mumbo jumbo with Miss St. Cloud, the writhing subjects seemed unable to pull their fingers apart.

Two of the victims were chosen for further hilarity. The girl held the audience's attention better than the other performers had. By the time she had finished, one of the volunteers had completely disarranged his suit, scratching imaginary insects and the other, a typical Colonel Blimp figure, had drawn mild titters from the audience—this was an enthusiastic response

for Britishers, Napoleon Solo decided—as he attempted to wiggle in and out of an invisible girdle.

All through the hypnotist's act, Solo found himself staring at the girl's hair. Silken-yellow it was, with the lacquered metal look of a heavy dose of spray. Something about the whole performance bothered him, nudging the back of his conscious mind.

At the turn's end, Miss St. Cloud snapped her fingers. She kissed each volunteer on the forehead as he awakened, and thanked them both for letting her hypnotize them. Then she walked smartly off stage. The next turn was Clyde and Jasper. Jasper turned out to be a dachshund who jumped through hoops and rang bells with his paw to add simple sums.

Only then did he realize what was wrong.

Coming into The Rocker Shop from the drizzling fog, he and Illya Kuryakin had paused under the naked bulbs of the club front. They'd glanced briefly at the poster announcing the various turns. A female hypnotist was given prominent billing. Solo couldn't remember the posted name, but her photo, a black and white theatrical glossy mounted, registered now.

The girl vaudevillian whose face was displayed on the street was a brunette. She was rather pretty but pudgy-cheeked. She in no way resembled the blonde.

Napoleon Solo stood up abruptly. He gave his head one sharp shake to clear it of the fumes of the good English ale. He'd watched Cleo St. Cloud's whole act under the assumption that Illya had taken a stool at the bar, not wanting to disturb the silence which prevailed while the girl was on stage. With a crawling sensation on his scalp, Solo wondered whether he'd made a wrong assumption.

He turned quickly. Two RAE officers sat at the bar. There was no one else.

Illya Kuryakin wasn't in sight anywhere.

Apprehension began to gnaw Solo's gut. He barely remembered to put a few pound notes on the tablecloth. Then he started for the bar. The man on duty, a beefy fellow with a huge red moustaches, was cooperative enough:

"Funny thin chap, wasn't 'e? 'Air down in his eyes, right? I figured maybe 'e was a replacement for one of the Costermongers. They're always 'avin bloody fights over 'oo gets 'ow much of the take. One or the other of 'em quits every week or so. Yes, your friend was 'ere, right enough. Just about the time Miss St. Cloud came on stage. Didn't look 'erself tonight. New wig, I guess. I'm nearsighted, y'know. The missus is always nagging me to get eyeglasses—"

"I appreciate all that," Solo said. "Your missus must be a sterling woman."

"You wouldn't be givin' me some of your American 'ighbrow lip, would you, mate?"

"I am not. I just want to know when you saw my friend last."

"Told yer! Right around the time Miss St. Cloud come on."

"What happened to him? Where did he go?"

"If yer want to be blunt about it, 'a went to the water closet to wash 'is 'ands."

The barkeep jerked a well- fleshed thumb. Napoleon Solo charged toward the dim little stair way leading down.

In the small lower-level corridor, harshly lighted, the paint peeling from its orange walls, Solo stopped.

"Illya?" He said it softly. Some thing moved at the corner of his vision. He jerked around, hand going under his smartly tailored jacket for the butt of his ever-ready pistol.

But what had caught his attention was only his own reflection in the large mirror-glass front of a cheap American-style vending machine which sold combs, packets of tissues, headache and upset stomach remedies and

similar items. Solo stared at his image in the mirror, which covered half the front of the chrome-knobbed machine. Mr. Waverly had sent them out to dine and think while he attended to paper work. Now Solo had blown the whole bit for fair.

"You bloody fool," he said to the mirror. "To coin a phrase."

Pulling out his pistol, he edged carefully through the door labeled *Gentlemen's*. Nothing.

He edged back into the hall and walked to its end, where there was another door. This he pulled open, dodging back.

Light spilled out ahead of him. Dampness tugged at his cuffs. He advanced cautiously up a short flight of concrete stairs which ended at the cobbles of an alley above. He sniffed the night air with its mixture of fish and petrol aromas. No one was in the alley.

On the Street taxicabs and private cars were passing, wet bonnets reflecting bizarre patterns of the multicolored Soho neons. Illya was gone.

Illya was gone and Solo was sure THRUSH had him.

Then, with an abruptness that made him jump there was a low, insistent beep from his inner left breast pocket. He whipped out his communicator, flicked a knob on the surface of the flat black box. The signal intensified.

Solo was switched onto the channel used for homing devices. Somewhere, somehow, Illya had managed to activate one.

In five minutes Solo had switched channels briefly, made an emergency call, summoned one of the U.N.C.L.E. vehicles at his disposal, a dilapidated-looking, high-powered taxicab, and was ripping through the London Streets. The man at the wheel drove at highly illegal speeds. Solo sat tensely be side him, the homing signal chattering loudly from where the receiver lay on the leather seat beside him.

What worried him was knowing that a homing signal going full force did not necessarily indicate that the person who'd turned it on was still live.

FIVE

STEPPING FROM the Gentlemen's into the seedy orange-painted hall, Illya Kuryakin's attention was caught by two things.

One was a spattering of applause. It indicated that the musically impoverished group known as The Costermongers had departed the stage. The other was his frankly jaunty appearance, visible in a mirror on the front of a garish vending machine.

Ordinarily Illya didn't indulge in cigars. But the large, executive- type Corona-Corona Special Deluxe clenched between his teeth at a jaunty angle lent him, he felt, a debonair appearance which be rather fancied. He stepped closer to the mirror to pull up the knot in his rep tie a bit more neatly.

The mirror opened outward from the vending machine and smashed him across the face.

Illya reeled back. He was more outraged than hurt. Grinning at him from inside the vending machine was a pock-faced man with a pistol.

"Be so kind as to stand in that place, Mr. Kuryakin. The others will be along momentarily."

Illya had no desire to wait and make their acquaintance. As the lower half of the vending machine began to open also, like the bottom of a Dutch door, Illya lashed out with a savage kick. The kick smashed the door, and the gunman, back inside the vending machine. The gunman cursed, flailed. He extended his pistol hand out of the machine for a better aim at the U.N.C.L.E. agent. Illya slammed the upper door hard.

The man squealed.

"Sing, my little THRUSH," IIlya said with cheerful nastiness as the man's fingers flew open and the pistol dropped.

"Kuryakin!"

The command spun him around. Two more well-dressed men in bowlers and overcoats with velvet lapels had entered from the alley. Both carried guns. The spokesman rushed forward. There was a groan and a creak of metal from inside the vending machine. The ugly-faced Thrushmen both glanced in that direction. Illya used the interval to dive his hand under his coat for his pistol.

He might have made it if the secret agent in the vending machine, apparently unconscious from having his gun hand nearly snapped off, hadn't slumped forward. The man's dead weight pushed both of the machine doors outward fast. Illya got another very un-funny bash in the nose. By the time he'd wrestled his pistol out of its shoulder rig the two assailants were on him.

They chopped the back of his neck with gun butts. Illya dropped to his knees, fighting the pain. He started to yell. One of the THRUSH uglies yanked his head back by the hair. The other jammed an unsavory-tasting leather glove between his jaws.

Then they flicked his face brutally a couple of more times with their pistol muzzles. They kept him from falling by dragging him under the arms.

Everything revolved in Illya's field of vision. Everything had the same quality of fuzziness he'd encountered after his first youthful bout with a flask of vodka.

"Quietly, quietly," snarled one of the THRUSH kidnappers as they dragged Illya through the door and up into the alley. His knees bumped painfully over the cobbles. Strength was returning. He mentally vetoed fighting any further for the moment. It might be more profitable to discover where he was being taken and, more importantly, to whom.

The answer to this last question came quickly. A squat, powerful Daimler auto, its blue fog lamps shining eerily through the murk, was parked around a bend in the alleyway. Illya was dumped on all fours in the tonneau. The THRUSH agents leaped into the front.

"Good evening, Kuryakin," said a voice which seemed to echo out of a funeral vault six miles away.

Illya turned his head. Lying on the floorboard, he was staring at the toe of a brightly polished boot. He twisted his head further. Above him floated an immense black mountain-shape, topped by a white blob. Gradually his eyes adjusted.

"Allow me, my dear fellow," said the rear seat's occupant, helping him up to a sitting position. As he collapsed against the leather, Illya felt something hard in his suit pocket strike against his hipbone. He remembered his communicator. He had to find an opportunity to set the homing signal for Napoleon.

He wondered why the car didn't start.

"We have been following you and your associate Solo all evening," commented his host, a big heap of a man bundled within a vicuna overcoat with a flamboyant fur collar. "I am glad my men were able to spare you excessive violence to your person. We have a very important task for you to perform. I'm sure you'll be delighted to cooperate."

The man had a strong, square, face, deeply tanned and seamed as though by exposure to rough weather. His nose was faintly hooked, perhaps denoting origins in the Levant. But his English was of Oxford. He had a neatly-trimmed black spade beard and wore a fur diplomat's cap and kid-skin gloves.

He peeled off the right glove and extended his hand. "It would be courteous if I introduced myself. Commander Victor Ahab, sir."

Illya's eyes narrowed. "No, thank you," he said to the hand.

Ahab's cheeks puffed out. He blasted Illya Kuryakin across the face with the back of his bare hand, a slamming blow. Illya swallowed, lifted his right fist. The guns aimed at him by the agents in the front seat deterred him.

Victor Ahab, THRUSH naval strategist, was quivering. "You—you filthy, degenerate, arrogant little U.N.C.L.E. upstart!"

Ahab carefully pulled his glove on again. He cleared his throat. "I am grateful I don't have to do much business with you, Kuryakin. I would very likely break your neck with my own hands." He smiled. "As you have just discovered, I am rather easily provoked to anger. It is perhaps my one failing."

Illya wondered how he could find an opportunity to turn on the homing transmitter. "You are supposed to be dead."

"The world is full of little surprises. It was expedient that I disappear for a time. I have emerged to what will surely be my finest hour. And THRUSH's."

One of the operatives in front said, "Beg pardon, Commander."

"What is it?"

"Miss Cleo's turn is over. She's coming now, sir."

"Get the engine going. We have pressing work for Mr. Kuryakin in Golder's Green." High heels ticked outside the car. A young woman's form took shape in the mist. Victor Ahab folded down the jump seat for her, then bent across toward the door handle. His formidable paunch prevented him from reaching it.

"Come, Kuryakin! Don't be a boor."

This was the opportunity. Illya hunched around to the right, using his left hand to depress the handle. The girl, trailing perfume, jumped inside with a jingly little laugh of satisfaction. She smoothed down her bolero jacket of gleaming silver fox, and all these bits of business gave Illya the moment he

needed to slip his right hand into his pocket, activate the proper stud, and send a signal silently into the night.

It was the signal to his friend Napoleon Solo.

The Daimler's engine whispered. The car glided out into gaudy neon traffic at a cautious speed. Commander Ahab gestured to the prisoner.

"Cleo my sweet, allow me to present your next subject. Mr. Kuryakin of U.N.C.L.E. This is Miss Cleo St. Cloud, a most experienced young woman."

"Well, not really," the girl laughed. She eyed Illya like a lawyer.

"Ah, now, don't be modest," said Commander Ahab, tweaking her knee. Miss St. Cloud shuddered.

"I didn't mean that I wasn't experienced, Victor."

"And naturally I referred to your experience in the area of hypnosis, my dear."

Illya decided that she was quite stunning. But her smile was brittle. And her green eyes, like the eyes of all the followers of the supra-government that was THRUSH, were holes into a secret world where lived an unholy lust to conquer at any cost. She spoke:

"What I meant to say, Mr. Kuryakin, was that my name really isn't Cleo St. Cloud. I'm wanted in a few too many countries for me to tell you what my name really is. Cleo will do. Victor, give me a cigarette."

Ahab wheezed, tugging out a silver case in a way which Illya found nauseating. Cleo lit up, drew in a couple of hot blue drags, then smiled at him. "We doped the real Miss St. Cloud, Mr. Kuryakin. I took her place on stage tonight, once we were sure you were in the club with your friend. I haven't done one of those stage routines in years. Fortunately I got through it. My real subject is you."

Illya tried to look bored. "Hypnotism is nothing but cheap theatrics.,,"

"Oh no, sweets, on the contrary," said Cleo. "It's a widely used medical tool."

"Better hurry, my dear," Ahab said. "It won't take us long to reach Golder's Green. You see, Mr. Kuryakin, what we plan is simplicity itself. In order to complete the THRUSH project of which I am the supervisor—project, incidentally, which will finally and for all time result in the total domination of all nations by THRUSH—require exclusive use of certain research data which is the property of Dr. Artemus Shelley."

"By exclusive use," Illya said, "you mean you take or destroy the data so that no one else can use it? And then you insure its exclusively by making sure Dr. Shelley is either in your hands or dead?"

Commander Ahab's black beard gleamed as he nodded. "Unfortunately, you and your friend Solo balked our attempt to kidnap Shelley and get him out of the country. You also foiled certain associates of mine, who are going to wish they'd succeeded, when they tried to eliminate Dr. Shelley at the hospital.

"Now, however, while other phases of the plan go forward, we must get Shelley's secret data from his files. His laboratory is under heavy guard. Only one sort of person could manage to get in. A recognized, trusted agent of U.N.C.L.E."

Lights glided past the car in the fog. Illya had a feeling of isolation, of being hopelessly trapped. Only the knowledge that the homing signal was being beamed to Solo's pocket communicator buoyed him up.

"You want me to go into the lab and find his papers?" Illya said. "What makes you possibly think I would?"

Commander Ahab chuckled as the car took a corner. "We know you wouldn't. Voluntarily."

Cleo St. Cloud had opened the front of her silver fox jacket. She unfastened a gold chain around her neck. A large stone which appeared to be glass, hung from the chain on her bosom. When she pulled the chain free the

stone's retaining ring allowed the stone to slide down to one end, where it dangled.

Next she flicked the cheap-looking glassy bauble with her finger.

Immediately it began to glow a deep red.

The reddish light pulsed stronger and weaker. It cast a weird ruby glow over the interior of the racing car.

"Here, Victor, you do the honors," Cleo said. "Swing it gently back and forth. Gently! Now, Mr. Kuryakin, I am going to place you into the deepest state of hypnosis. That business of subjects being unable to be hypnotized against their will, and of refusing to do anything against their morals—both those notions are simply more of the tommyrot which surrounds the science of hypnotism. If they weren't sheer myths, I wouldn't dare tell you what I'm telling you, would I?"

She smiled with sweet venom. Illya had difficulty keeping his eyes off the bauble at the end of the chain. Ahab swung it back and forth, back and forth, while the reddish light from its interior, a small, burning spot of brightness, alternately brightened and dimmed, brightened and dimmed.

Illya began to feel dizzy.

"I intend to give you two simple post-hypnotic suggestions, Mr. Kuryakin. One will be an order to go into Dr. Shelley's laboratory and search it, tear it apart, until you locate a file folder which bears the code letters CR dash ninety-nine dash two. You will destroy it. The second suggestion will be an order to instantly shoot and kill anyone who disturbs you. How are you feeling, Mr. Kuryakin? Eyelids heavy?"

Illya shook his head. "No-no, I'm wide awake. It won't work."

"Watch the light, Mr. Kuryakin." Her voice was soft, insinuating. "*Watch the ruby light*. You are tired, Mr. Kuryakin. *You are tired in every muscle, every fiber of your body. Weary to death. You have one consuming desire. The desire for sleep*—"

Cold horror welled up in Illya's mind. What if the plot worked?

What if by some mad chance he did fall under their command? What if he were instructed to shoot and kill anyone who attempted to stop him from searching Shelley's quarters? The homing transmitter was silently signaling from his pocket, the signal searching the night, hunting for Solo, bringing Solo in pursuit.

He had to turn off the transmitter.

His hands, like fifty-pound bags of cement, remained in his lap. He could not move them.

Back, forth, back, forth went the ruby light on the chain. Brighter, dimmer, brighter— "*Sleep, Mr. Kuryakin. You are sleepy, totally tired, ready to obey me—*"

Fight it, fight it, fight it, he thought. The ruby light swelled and filled the world. Then every thing went black.

The Daimler let him out on a damp, foggy corner, then sped off into the dark. Illya Kuryakin stood shivering under a lonely streetlamp.

His mouth was slack. His eyes were empty of emotion. He began to walk along the pavement under the looming cement wall of a building whose large signboard read FLETCHAM AND STROOL, WOOLEN GOODS.

Two U.N.C.L.E. security men with triangular badges challenged him at the gate in the wire fence round the next corner. Illya identified himself and was admitted. His right hand curled around the butt of a pistol which had somehow gotten into his pocket.

He had almost pulled it out and shot the two guards to death for presuming to question him.

And nothing remained in his mind to tell him that Napoleon Solo was on the way.

ACT II

"NOBODY HERE BUT US TOURISTS"

THE TAXICAB deposited Napoleon Solo in front of the innocuous and deserted facade of Fletcham & Strool, Woolen Goods. The driver, an U.N.C.L.E. man, said, "Want a bit of help, sir?"

Climbing out, Solo shook his head. "Let me look the situation over first. You cruise around a little. If you spot anything, suspicious cars or whatnot, go right on. Circle back, park here and wait. Got your receiver on the right band?"

The driver tapped his knuckles against a dashboard unit. "Channel F, lined up on yours."

"The homing signal is still going strong. Illya must be inside."

Solo turned up the amplification on his communicator, let the signal beep-beep loudly a second, then damped it down. He slammed the taxicab door. The vehicle rattled off.

Solo walked along under the gloomy wall. At the gate in the wire fence around the corner, he discovered two agents with riot pistols. He flashed his identification.

"Solo, Operations and Enforcement out of New York."

The taller guard hooked an eye brow up. "One of your mates is already 'ere, sir. Mr. Kurry-what's-'is-name."

Solo's backbone crawled again. "Kuryakin. How long has he been inside?"

"Five, ten minutes, I'd say."

"Alone?"

"Right."

"How did he look? Banged up? Like he'd been beaten? Or drugged?"

"Seemed all right to us, sir. Spoke a little slowly. Yawned once. It's late, though."

"I hope it's not later than we think," Solo said, slipping past them.

One of the guards threw an electric switch on the gate post. The lock in the steel outer door whirred. Solo stepped through into the hollow emptiness of a warehouse full of bales on wooden pallets.

Far down an aisle a light gleamed. Carefully Solo drew out his pistol and began walking.

He was drenched with cold sweat and sure something was diabolically wrong.

If Illya had escaped his captors, he would have turned off the homing signal and called via Channel D. Yet THRUSH was not so lunatic as to send a captive Illya off on his own. Solo didn't understand it. But his lonely passage through the eerie, towering avenues of stacked bales wrenched his nerves another notch tighter.

The bale storage area came to an end. Ahead brighter lights gleamed in a short corridor. There was a gray-painted door at the end. Beyond that door should lie Dr. Shelley's outer workrooms.

Warily, Solo ran forward.

Half way down the corridor, Solo dug in his heels and skidded up short. From beyond the gray-painted door he heard bangs and crashings, as though of office furniture being overturned. He sniffed. The source of the acrid odor became clear in a moment. From under the gray-painted door, wisps of smoke were curling.

He jumped to the heavy door, pulled it open quickly. "Illya?"

Solo could see little of the area beyond the first workroom, which boiled with smoke. The smoke issued from another doorway in the far side of the

room, which was full of filing cabinets. Holding a hand to his mouth, Solo advanced. Beyond the next doorway, bright spurts of flame flickered through the roiling grayness.

He called Illya's name again. The answer came back, curiously fiat, nasal:

"Who is that?"

"Napoleon." Now Solo was near the inner door. "Did THRUSH fire the place? Where are you—" Just at the moment he reached the door the smoke thinned momentarily. He was on the verge of entering Dr. Shelley's inner laboratory when something in his unconscious checked him. Illya's voice sounded too strange.

Solo strained to see through the smoke billowing from the contents of a number of filing cabinets. The files smoldered on the tile floor between two long laboratory benches laden with glassware. A shape whirled the smoke.

Illya's head emerged from the smoke first. Then his torso, arms and hands. In his left hand Illya gripped a fat file folder with a gray cover. In his right was a gun, aimed directly at Solo in the doorway.

A relieved grin spread over Solo face. "You're alone. I thought for a minute —"

Solo stopped. Illya's face was immobile as marble. His eyes had a strange, empty look in them. Suddenly Illya's right hand twitched. It was all the warning Solo had.

He rolled like a tumbler, wildly, as Illya began pumping bullets at the door.

The shots crashed in the smoky tab. Solo somersaulted up and threw his whole weight at Illya, grappling for his gun hand. The moment Solo's hand closed on his wrist, Illya began to snarl and fight. He dropped the file folder accidentally and this seemed to panic him. He kicked at it, trying to shove it toward the smoldering pile of manuscripts.

Solo struggled to wrestle the gun away. Illya's face was ugly.

"You mustn't stop me. You musn't stop me." He repeated it in a kind of mechanical desperation. Whatever drug had been given him, Solo decided, had also given a tremendous boost to his strength. Despite the fact that Solo had hold of Illya's gun wrist with both hands, Illya was still managing to turn that gun so it pointed right at Solo's belt buckle.

Solo felt Illya's arm writhe.

That warning he felt through his fingers saved his life. The pistol whammed an instant after Solo released his grip and jackknifed back wards.

The bullet blasted lab glassware on the nearby bench. A shard hit Solo's cheek, slashed it open. Illya seemed to have forgotten the file folder. It lay on the floor, its upper right corner smoldering.

Illya lurched through the smoke, coughing. His gun muzzle quested for Solo, who was floundering in the middle of a mess of broken glass. Suddenly Illya gave a savage wince. He shuddered.

"You—shouldn't have come here." He whimpered it, almost as though he recognized his friend. "I don't want—to kill you. I haven't any choice, Na —" He stumbled over the name, pronounced it haltingly. "Napoleon."

Then, as though wracked by awful internal pressures, he threw his head back and howled, "I haven't any choice!"

Illya's face glazed over again. He wrapped both hands around the pistol to steady it. He took one step and pointed at his friend's forehead.

Through all this, Solo had been crouched against one of the lab bench fronts. Illya was three feet away, aiming. Solo whipped his hand over his head. He grabbed the first thing his fingers touched, yanked. A Bunsen burner and its tubing—Illya Kuryakin shuddered and fired once, twice. Solo was rolling again, his other cheek cut by broken glass as he skidded across the floor. He jumped up. Using the base ring of the burner as his weapon, he lunged in from the side.

Illya tried to turn. He seemed dazed, slow-moving. Solo crashed the burner ring down on his friend's skull with all his might.

Illya groaned. Solo gave him a hand-chop to the back of the neck. Illya dropped to his knees.

Napoleon Solo snatched his gun as it fell. Illya blinked, shook his head. Then he caught sight of the gray folder with the code letters CR-99-2 embossed on the cover. His hand twitched feebly toward it.

"Got to burn that," he said. Then louder, anguished: "Got to burn that, got to burn it—"

Part of the cover was alight, sending up sparks. Solo snatched the folder from the blazing pile of reference papers. Illya let out a moan of frustration. He covered his face and sobbed.

What was wrong with him? Solo wondered as he slapped the file cover against his trousers to douse the sparks. He caught his friend by the scruff of his coat collar and dragged him away from the flames. Illya continued to burble and moan, eyes closed, as though tortured by his failure. Solo hauled him all the way into the outer workroom.

Using the butt of Illya's gun, Solo smashed the glass in a wall fire alarm box. Immediately, sprinklers recessed in the ceiling began a hissing deluge. A siren warbled. Solo sheltered the charred file against his jacket and staggered through the smoke to find a telephone and call for an U.N.C.L.E. ambulance.

Illya Kuryakin had rolled over onto his face, totally motionless.

TWO

MR. ALEXANDER WAVERLY ticked the stem of his pipe against his teeth.

"Hypnosis, eh? Devilish."

Slouched deep in one of the leather chairs in the old Victorian headquarters room, his head muffled from the eyebrows up in a bandage, Illya looked disconsolate.

"Apparently it wasn't so deep that I didn't struggle to break out," he said. "I think I realized it was Napoleon I would be shooting. Otherwise I have no memory of what happened after Miss St. Cloud—that isn't her real name, by the way—began her tender ministrations in Commander Ahab's car.."

Napoleon Solo had been listening with half an ear. Now he put the telephone back on its cradle, crossed the rug to where an even more fatigued-looking Mr. Waverly leaned against the mantel.

"We can go up to the computer center any time, sir," Solo said. He grinned at Illya. "Are you up to it, Sleeping Beauty?"

Illya Kuryakin stood up, swaying a little. He managed a half-way grin. "I find your levity difficult to understand, Napoleon. After all, I very nearly removed any further opportunities for you to go over coat shopping."

Solo looked serious. "You wouldn't have gone through with it. I still owe you thirty-three dollars from our last gin rummy game."

The three men left the room. They moved down a stuffy corridor full of upholstered furniture and rubber plants and entered an elevator. It rose swiftly. Mr. Waverly bestirred himself from a rather cross-eyed mood of concentration, cleared his throat.

"Yes, it was a near thing all around," he said. "But at least it has netted us certain facts."

Solo nodded. "Commander Ahab is with us, and apparently masterminding a new major operation for THRUSH."

"And somehow or other, it centers around tidal waves and other oceanographic phenomenon," Waverly continued as the steel cage stopped.

They moved out into an upper-story corridor which was bare of the Victorian furnishings found on the lower levels. Here, squarely functional lighted panels winked on and off in the ceiling, teleprinters whirred beyond the open door ways of fluorescently bright rooms, and personnel moved briskly back and forth on various errands.

Mr. Waverly continued in a musing tone: "Since you, Mr. Solo, managed to overcome Mr. Kuryakin before he burned Dr. Shelley's CR-99-2 file, we really owe our opponents thanks. They led us to the key material which Dr. Shelley, due to his unconscious state, could not pinpoint for us. We may now make certain judgments about the current THRUSH activity."

Mr. Waverly's brow rose inquiringly. Illya Kuryakin picked up the cue.

"We must assume that the tidal wave which nearly killed us was not an accident," he said. "Newsom Nagelsmith may have summoned it from an unknown source when he realized he was finished." Illya didn't need to elaborate further on the grim threat posed by this kind of scientific manipulation of natural forces.

Solo pondered a minute, said:

"From the contents of that file, we also know Dr. Shelley was gathering reports and data on similar tidal waves that have occurred mysteriously at various places around the world during the past year. He may or may not have concluded that THRUSH was perfecting a means to control ocean currents. But THRUSH thought he'd stumble on it sooner or later if he hadn't already. So that was a good enough reason for them wanting both Dr. Shelley and his master file wiped out."

"Good thinking, Mr. Solo." Waverly rolled back sliding glass doors and stepped into a two-story chamber filled with incredibly big computers all a-dazzle with winking lights.

A young man with spectacles as thick as safety glass bustled toward them as Waverly finished: "Now we must attempt to make some sense out of that one small hand-scribbled note we discovered in the file. Ah, Boltshot, good morning."

"Morning, sir, morning," said the computer technician. Noting Illya's bandage-swaddled head, he added, "You visiting firemen must have been spending a bit of time carousing, eh? Well, nothing like a good night on the town away from home."

"That's right," Solo said sourly. "It's just been one good time after another."

Mr. Waverly gestured. "Which of these units have you programmed with the problem, Boltshot?"

Dry-washing his hands, the technician led the way. "Right down here, sir. Supervac twenty-two-Q our latest addition. It's a regular little darling of a unit, sir. The only thing Supervac twenty-two-Q can't do is cook up a nice bowl of red cabbage and if it ever learns to do that, Tessie my dear, I tell my wife, you'll be posting a Situation Wanted in the newspaper."

The technician whipped a punch card from a slot in the nearest, Eight-flecked monster.

"As I was given the details, sir, Dr. Shelley's file contained a handwritten excerpt from a news clipping to the effect that some fishermen off the coast of Holland swore one day last month that they saw something like a white whale surfacing. Fantastic, of course. They were probably loaded with schnapps."

Under Waverly's glare, Boltshot returned his attention to the card, waving it back and forth: "Uh—well, you wish to know whether this whale-like apparition could have been a submarine. Of course Supervac has no way of telling that. Operating upon your second assumption—that the thing was a submarine—what locations might currently be serving as the necessary fuelling station or stations? Supervac has no way of knowing that, either."

Illya said darkly, "It must be good for something." Two tape drums began to spin with an eerie whine. Napoleon Solo nudged his friend.

"You've hurt its feelings."

Boltshot sniffed. "Many lay persons do not understand the computer, gentlemen. It can only perform within certain fixed limits. One thing it can do is report on locations in Europe at which THRUSH operatives have been observed within the last six months. Narrowing the selection to locations in a coastal position—obviously a requirement for a submarine fueling station—Supervac twenty- two-Q has already pinpointed a single current possibility."

Boltshot thrust another punched card proudly at Mr. Waverly, who scowled.

"Come, come, man, I can't make out what these holes mean!"

"The language of logic, sir. This punch stands for Cornwall. This punch, the coast. This punch, Castle Sykedon. That's a small village whose exact location can be found on any map. I went to the trouble of phoning up the Information Center for additional facts. Castle Sykedon, for which the village was named, is an actual feudal castle which has stood in disrepair for many years.

"Mid-summer of last year, a private syndicate known as Pan-British Tourist Properties, Ltd., bought it up and refurbished it. They opened it in late September as an attraction for visitors. There were workmen of all sorts on the scene for months prior to this time, or so the Center told me. There was a great deal of heavy construction equipment present also. And THRUSH agents were seen in the vicinity at various times."

Mr. Waverly touched the punch card with his pipe. "This may well be it."

Frown lines appeared on Solo's forehead. "Refurbishing an entire castle would be a perfect cover for moving in the equipment needed to build a submarine fuelling station. That is, provided the castle itself is actually located on the water."

Boltshot looked wounded. "We specifically requested Supervac to supply only those locations which are directly on the ocean. Supervac does not make mistakes."

Mr. Waverly nodded briskly. "Yes, yes, Boltshot, no offense in tended. Thank you very much."

As they rode downward in the elevator again, Mr. Waverly said, "Gentlemen, I believe we may finally be making some headway to ward uncovering the nature of Project Ahab. The sightings by the Dutch fisherman—Naglesmith's warnings about a white whale—the mysterious reappearance of Commander Ahab—Dr. Shelley's research—it all points to something extremely big and extremely dangerous for U.N.C.L.E. and the world. Mr. Solo, is your Brownie in repair?"

The elevator stopped. Solo said, "I beg your pardon?"

"Your Brownie, your Kodak, your camera. All tourists carry cameras."

"I have a feeling," Illya said, "we are going to be sent on holiday."

"All expenses paid," said Mr. Waverly, unsmiling. He waved the punch card. "To Cornwall."

THREE

THE ROAD was steep. It wound upward from the tiny village, a gravel thoroughfare so rough that tourists had to take it on foot. The central crown of the roadway stuck up so high that it would have scraped away half the underparts of any taxicab which attempted the trip.

The air smelled of sea wind. Far below, combers broke on rocks. Solo and Illya had been tramping for perhaps fifteen minutes. The afternoon was bright and sunny.

Ahead of them the road twisted out of sight behind huge boulders. But their destination loomed against the sky, great stone turrets standing out in sinister relief. Dozens of tourists of every description were going up and down the road to Castle Sykedon.

Solo and Illya passed a low, flat rock upon which sat two portly American ladies. One had her shoe off.

She was massaging her toe and bewailing the inavailabiity of Coca-Cola.

"Personally," Solo said out of the corner of his mouth, "I think we've carried things a little far with this get-up. This idiotic tassel keeps falling in my eyes."

Illya was attired in a wide-brimmed straw hat and one-way sunglasses with immense lenses. He carried two cameras and a gadget bag strung over his shoulders. He clucked his tongue.

"It may irritate you, Napoleon, but it's excellent cover. No one will remember our faces, only our paraphernalia. Besides, Americans overseas always go out of their way to look like Americans."

He was referring to Solo's red fez with black tassel. The fez bore gold embroidery identifying the wearer as a member of the Imperial Order of Pachyderms, Lodge No. 302. Solo also had a camera strung around his neck, and a gadget bag bulging with road maps, tourist folders and several bags of potato chips.

In a few more moments they reached the summit of the road. Tourists were lined up outside a booth beside a turnstile set in a high outer stone wall. Two men who looked much too burly and scarred to be villagers collected entrance fees, scrutinizing each arrival hard eyes. As they got in line, Illya whispered, "Look at those lads. Do you hear a bird singing?"

"The yellow-backed thrush, I think it is," Solo answered.

When their turn came, the guards seemed to inspect them with extra care. Solo felt sweat on his eyelid under his sunglasses. Finally one guard slapped a ticket into Solo's hand. He jerked his thumb at the turnstile. Solo and then Illya passed through.

As they wandered over to the parapet on the sea side of the castle courtyard, Illya said, "I saw the second guard in the booth turn some sort of switch.

Probably a scanner. Lucky we didn't fetch our guns along."

Solo shrugged. "I suppose. But I don't feel very secure just armed with potato chips."

Along the parapet tourists leaned over for a dizzying view of the cliffs on which Castle Sykedon was built. Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin joined in the activity. Their interest was more specific. They kept up a running line of inane chatter while their eyes ranged back and forth, hunting for some trace of shadow down at the base of the cliff hundreds of yards down. A brisk sea was running. Waves crashed in and foamed onto big rocks far below.

"Nothing shows," Illya whispered after a moment.

"Good old Supervac Twenty-two-Q does it again," Solo said disgustedly.

Suddenly, though, his attention was caught by a dull metal flash under the surface of the water directly below him. The patch of water in question roiled between two partly submerged boulders which were farther apart than most of the other rocks. By a freak of the tides, the passage was momentarily untroubled by waves. Solo had a chance to take a lightning quick second look.

Illya watched him intently. Solo whipped his camera from around his neck, pretended to snap a soaring gull. Behind the camera's cover, he said, "I saw it. Some kind of protective wire grill or grating in that channel. Under the surface. Probably electrified, raised and lowered from inside."

With a fatuous look on his face, he finished fooling with his camera and turned back to the courtyard. Sure enough, one of the uniformed guards in the booth was watching them. Solo gestured at the high stone steps leading up into the castle. Pretending to laugh, he said, "I think we've found our bird's nest. That's a net guarding a sub pen entrance down there. Let's go to work."

Their feet clacked as they passed into the gloom of Castle Sykedon. A placard near the entrance announced that the castle closed for the day at six.

Less than three hours.

At various points in the corridors and huge, vaulted halls, stiff-backed guards in neat, undistinguished uniforms stood with hands laced at the small of the backs, staring ahead at nothing. Their eyes never seemed to move, but Solo had the uncanny feeling that no visitor went unobserved. From the tough jaw-lines and broken noses of some of these specimens, Solo felt even more sure that they were in a THRUSH installation.

In the huge main dining hall of the castle, Illya and Solo drew off into a corner and pretended to admire an intricately wrought suit of armor. The light was dim, falling through high open slit windows. Only one THRUSH guard watched this chamber. He was stationed at the entrance.

Solo took a small sketch pad and charcoal pencil from his gadget bag. He penciled the words *Need hide till six* on the pad. Then, with bold, quick strokes, he made a sketch of the casque of the armored figure on top of the message, obscuring it. As he and Illya left the chamber Solo noted that the guard's eyes slid around to get a clear look at the sheet of paper on which he was still doing some shading.

They explored further, moving in and out of the crowds of families, widows, of schoolchildren. In one cobweb-hung cul-de-sac on the main floor, the agents spotted a large, old wooden chest. It looked large enough to accommodate both of them. Illya sat down on it. He complained loudly about smarting bunions.

By shifting his weight back and forth Illya was able to determine that the lid of the chest was not nailed shut. Solo sat down next to him, made some more corrections on the armor sketch. He used his scribblings to jot some additional code words suggesting his plan of action. Illya nodded. A guard passed by the entrance to the cul-de-sac, pausing to tie his shoe.

"Well, Wilbur," Solo said in a loud voice, "let's get this show on the road." Settling his fez at jaunty angle, he marched over to the guard. "Is there a pop concession any place around?"

"No, there isn't." The guard had a rumbling voice and a right ear which bore an ugly scar.

"Well, guess I'll just have to eat some of my own potato chips." Solo pulled out a cellophane sack. Making a great show, he tore it open. The guard scowled as Solo and Illya began to munch chips by the handful, dribbling a trail of crumbs behind them.

Up ahead, a number of stout women in floral print dresses and picture hats had stopped before an impressively carved throne chair. One of their number was reading from a guidebook. Solo dug in the bottom of the potato chip bag until he found the pellet he wanted.

He drifted around to a position on the left side of the many-chinned lady reading from the guidebook. Suddenly from the back of the crowd, Illya said, "Oh, I'm very sorry. Terribly clumsy of me—"

Several of the ladies moved out of the way. Illya had spilled his potato chips in grand and crumby style. Heads turned front. The portly lady stood on tiptoe and abandoned the guidebook a moment. Solo cracked the pellet with his thumbnail, and tossed it.

The pellet rolled along the floor, where it lay unobtrusively a few inches behind the lady's right heel. Nothing visible could be seen escaping from the crack in the pellet. But in another moment, the lady began to fan herself with a lace hanky.

"Girls! Girls!" she called. "Time to move on to the next point of interest, which is King Woglyn's water closet—ahem. I believe that's one point of interest we might pass over. I—"

The woman's eyes grew glassy. She dropped the guidebook, swaying. "I feel—faint. It must be the sea air doing it. My legs—I can hardly—" Three of her compatriots rushed forward, luckily catching her bulk before it hit the floor. Consternation gripped the ladies.

Clutching his fez, Napoleon Solo raced back to the guard stationed at the entrance to the cul-de-sac. "A woman's fainted over there."

The guard seemed reluctant to leave his post. The flustered outcries of the females changed his mind. Annoyed, he stalked forward and into the group.

Other guards appeared. Illya Kuryakin had backed away. Solo gave a quick nod and both agents faded quietly down the cul-de-sac. Moments later, they lowered the lid of the huge chest.

Solo tore the cover of a paper match packet in half, carefully wedged it under the lid. The tiny crack thus produced was enough to enable him to see what was happening outside.

The lady who had fainted from the fumes of the invisible and relatively harmless nerve gas was carried out of sight. Her cohorts followed. Soon the guard was back on duty at the cul-de-sac's entrance. He glanced around suspiciously. Hardly breathing, Solo and Illya crouched in painfully cramped positions inside the chest.

Ten minutes passed.

Fifteen.

Surreptitiously, the guard got out a cigarette and lit it. Cupping it so that it was hidden in one hand, he walked over to the chest, sat down heavily. Solo's view was cut off as the guard's weight bore down.

After a seemingly endless time the guard got up again. Voices drifted faintly through the chest walls. Finally, when it seemed as though he couldn't stand the ache of his pretzel-like position any longer, Solo noted that the illuminated hands on his watch stood at a few minutes past six.

Somewhere heavy doors clanged shut. A mammoth rattle of iron signaled the shooting of a bolt. Footsteps passed the chest. Solo peered out.

He saw the scar-eared guard reach up and give a tug to the handle of an ancient, rusty battle ax hanging on the wall. There was a whir. The wall at the end of a cul-de-sac swung out, revealing a metal partition. This slid out of the way. The guard stepped into what looked like an elevator. The door closed, but the stone partition remained swung out.

During the next fifteen minutes, booted feet passed the chest often. The guards going off duty all took the elevator. At last, when darkness and silence claimed the castle proper again, Solo risked lifting the chest lid.

Illya followed him out. Solo's knees popped like silenced pistols as he straightened up.

"The stone's back in place," he whispered. "Grab the ax handle, Illya."

The other U.N.C.L.E. agent craned up, gave the handle a tug. There was a grinding whine as the partition once more swung aside. Unfortunately there was no indicator beside the call button to show whether the elevator was in use. Solo thumbed the button.

He heard a whine inside the shaft, a sigh of power as the cage reached their floor. The metal door slid aside—

Revealing a pair of startled THRUSH guards just drawing their guns.

FOUR

ONE OF THE occupants of the elevator was the guard with the scar on his ear. An expression of suspicion satisfied flashed over his thick-featured face. With a flick of his thumb he snapped the setting of his pistol to rapid fire, and began to blaze away point blank.

The two U.N.C.L.E. agents had lunged back out of the way, one to either side of the open doors. The guard's pistol stuttered, tracer rounds penciling white dashes through the gloom. Solo slammed against the wall, righted himself. He ripped the camera loose from around his neck and flung it like a baseball.

The camera whizzed full speed into the forehead of the second guard, who was just aiming. The man yelped, sagged. Off balance, he fell against the elevator control panel. The doors started to shut.

Seeing that his potential victims were unarmed, the scar-eared guard stopped firing. Backs pressed to opposite walls of the cul-de-sac, Solo and Illya looked at each other. Both understood that if the guards retreated into the elevator and got away, alarms would surely be sounded. Solo watched the guard warily.

The man was toying with them. He sidled forward so that he stood with his backbone against one elevator door, his boot braced against the other to keep the doors from shutting.

"I had a feeling there was some thing wrong about you two," the guard said. "I told my section chief you hadn't left the castle. The fool wouldn't believe me."

Crouched against the wall, Solo shrugged. "Obviously we've under estimated THRUSH again."

The guard laughed. "As always. Now, if you will be so kind as to accompany me—"

Solo said to his companion across the narrow corridor, "We'd better do what the man says. Climb over that chest and come on. But be careful."

From the corner of his eye, Solo noted the distance to the weapon he hoped to use. He advanced into the center of the corridor. Illya shrugged as if to agree that the odds were indeed too heavily weighted against them. Illya had been crouching behind the chest in which they'd hidden. The shortest way out was to step up on the chest and down on the other side.

Illya performed the first half of this maneuver, a hangdog expression of defeat on his face. He poised to jump down on the other side. Suddenly his legs flew out from under him in a perfect pratfall that landed him with a thump on his gluteus maximus.

The moment Illya started this distraction routine, Solo moved.

He leaped to the nearest suit of armor on its pedestal, shouted, "One side, Illya," and at the same time got behind the pedestal, which was equipped

with castors. A powerful shove, and Solo had the suit of armor rolling full speed at the elevator.

Illya dodged out of the way. The reactions of the guards were slow. Trying to do something useful for a change, the guard Solo had smacked with the camera lurched forward, jostling his companion. Both guards fired simultaneously. Their aims were off because of the accidental collision.

Ducked low, Solo was right behind the suit of armor as it rolled like a juggernaut into the opening of the elevator. The guards were knocked backward. The scar-eared one jammed his arm forward around the suit of armor wedged into the doorway. He was trying to get off a shot. Illya darted in, caught the out-thrust forearm and brought up his knee.

There was a splintery crack of bone. The guard shrieked, dropped his gun.

Solo gave a yank on the upraised mailed fist of the armor suit. Down it squeaked with surprising speed. The iron fingers hammered the top of the second guard's head. The man's jaw flopped open. His trigger finger jerked automatically. A spray of white tracer slugs screamed past Solo, as the agent reached around the armor and gut-punched his adversary with vicious accuracy.

The man staggered.

Solo's next neck-chop flattened the man cold. Solo looked back over his shoulder.

Illya's head appeared under the upraised arm of the suit of armor. Grinning with a humor he obviously didn't feel, Illya knocked his knuckles against the armored chest. It gave off a hollow ring like an empty oil drum being pounded.

"Stout fellow," Illya said. "We should recommend him to Waverly as a recruit."

"Some other time. Help me drag these birds behind that chest. The THRUSH people know we're still inside their gates. We've got to get

moving." Quickly he outlined his plan.

The two U.N.C.L.E. operatives dumped the guards, plus their cameras and gadget bags, behind the heavy chest. First, however, Solo took a small, flat plastic box from under his collection of potato chip sacks.

Gingerly he laid the plastic box on the chest corner.

"If we find anything down below, there are enough explosive gelcaps in there to take it out of action," he said.

Illya was busy peeling off the uniform blouse of the scar-eared guard. "And us right along with it?"

Solo said nothing about that disturbing possibility. They were inside the THRUSH headquarters, and how they escaped was secondary.

Quickly Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin finished their job, leaving the dazed guards in their boxer shorts and singlets behind the chest. A quick jab of an ampoule with a self-contained needle into the right bicep of each Thrushman insured their slumber for the next four hours.

Clad in the regalia of members of the Castle Sykedon guard staff, Solo and Illya freed the wedged suit of armor from the elevator and let the doors slide shut.

For a tense quarter of a minute Solo watched the indicator board above the door. The car remained stationary.

"We might make it," he said softly. "No one's hanging on the button to call the car. Now, what floor do we want?"

He turned to the control board. At the top of the board were buttons labeled C-1, C-2 and C-3. An amber bulb glowed next to the C-1 legend, indicating the car's current position.

Illya ran a finger down the board. Below the three levels for the castle, six more floors were indicated by numerals in descending order. There were

three more buttons at the board's bottom, marked P-3, 2 and 1. Solo indicated the lowermost button.

"P for submarine pen, do you suppose?" He gave a punch. The car whined and dropped.

Silence, interrupted only by the motorized murmur of the elevator cables. The amber lights glowed in sequence down the board.

Solo took a firmer grip on the gun which he'd lifted from the guard. Illya wiped his upper lip.

"I don't like the feel of this, Napoleon. It's all too easy."

Solo felt his uniform pocket to make certain he'd brought the plastic box of explosive gelcaps. The light for level P-2 went out. The one for P-1 lit. With a gentle whir, the cage stopped and the doors opened.

Illya Kuryakin thumbed the *Door Open* stud, held it. Both U.N.C.L.E. agents gaped.

High over their heads soared an arched ceiling carved and blasted from the green-shot gray stone of the Cornish cliffs. This roof was braced in strategic places by towering steel beams of a bright rust-red finish. The footings of the steel super-structure were set in thick concrete which stretched away before them, forming a huge T shaped platform.

As they edged out of the elevator, the two U.N.C.L.E. agents were in a position approximately at the center of the crossbar of the T. Ahead, like a pier, the stem of the T stretched out into a huge natural basin filled with quietly lapping dark water. On their left alongside this pier, moored down with a dozen foot-thick lines, rode the most bizarre seacraft they had ever seen.

"I think," Napoleon Solo softly said, "we've discovered the white whale."

The incredible low-slung metal craft was painted a very light shade of gray. Only in barest outline did it resemble a conventional submarine. Its length

was three to four times that of an ordinary sub. Its conning tower was little more than a streamlined blister rising about a foot or so above the dorsal surface.

Along the sides of the craft, from bow to stern, rows of large, oval viewports ran just above the waterline. The ports were made of dark green glass or some similar material, opaque and reflecting the shaded lights dangling from the rocky ceiling of the pen.

Catwalks and ladderways crisscrossed above them. Empty. The entire place was lifeless, soundless except for the whispering splash of water against the hull of the monster submarine. Far down past the sub's bow they saw a tall arched opening in the cave wall. The opening was barred by a thick steel grill which rose from the water. Beyond the grill, darkness. Solo was sure the far end of that black channel opened at sea.

He slipped the plastic box from his pocket. "Care to try a little harpooning?"

"I can think of more relaxing diversions," Illya replied under his breath. "Napoleon, this is too pat. They surely know we haven't left the castle—"

"I agree. But we've come this far and the odds are bad against getting out, so we should take the sub out of action while we can. Come on."

The agents walked quickly down the stone quay. Their borrowed boots clacked. Solo stuffed the gun in his leather belt, carefully opened the plastic box and removed one of the explosive gelcaps from its bed of special cushioning material. They were now at a point on the quay midway between bow and stern of the sub. Illya pointed at the dorsal blister.

"That hatch doesn't look secure," he said. "Shall we go aboard before we blow her?"

Solo shrugged, juggling the cap delicately in his palm. "With this much fat in the fire, a little more won't hurt."

They jumped across to the hull of the sub.

Illya Kuryakin knelt, slipped his fingers under the hatch, lifted. A moment later he pulled his head back from the hatch interior.

"There's a ladder down into some Sort of control room."

Solo signed for him to go ahead. Illya disappeared. Solo put a leg over, handicapped because he could only use his right hand. In his left he carried the highly sensitive capsule of explosive.

The gloom of the ladderway closed around him. Illya landed below with a light thump. Solo sent his right foot down to the next rung of the ladder. Suddenly he felt his sole skid, heard Illya's warning a fraction late: "Watch out for that third rung. There's a smear of oil or grease on—"

Solo's right foot slid off the rung. He grabbed for a rung above to check his fall. He was jerked up short. The violent pull made the fingers of his left hand open. The explosive capsule popped out into a high arc.

Hanging from the ladder, green with fear, Solo watched the capsule drop.

"Illya, catch it!" he choked out, watching the little football-shaped pill drop end over end, down and down with a kind of horrific slow-motion movement.

Illya jerked his head up, saw the falling capsule, extended his hands. The capsule sailed past his finger tips. Solo braced for the shattering explosion. He heard another thump, looked down.

Illya was lying on his spine, having tumbled himself underneath the capsule once he missed it. He'd shot up his right hand to catch the pellet just in time.

Solo felt his heart slow down from its frantic thudding pace. He dangled from the ladder, got his feet back on solid steel, completed his climb to the deck.

Tall panels of instruments covered the walls of the chamber, which was perhaps twenty feet long and half as wide. A highly futuristic-looking

periscope device hung from over their heads. The instruments and dials equipment were baffling, indicating an advanced state of the art.

"Here," Illya said, cheeks slicked with sweat, "you hold the baby." He handed over the gelcap.

Solo jerked a thumb at the forward bulkhead. "Let's explore that way. I'm curious to see the rest of this floating nightmare."

"*We shall be very happy to give you a guided tour, Mr. Solo. Welcome aboard*."

The sepulchral voice drove fear like needles into Solo's belly. The voice echoed from all around them, issuing from several concealed stereo speakers. Abruptly, tiny lights on the instrument consoles began to flicker.

Underfoot Solo felt a tingling. The air filled with a low, powerful hum. Illya's eyes rounded with recognition:

"I recognize that voice, Napoleon. It belongs to Commander Ahab."

Even as Illya spoke, a section of bulkhead slid aside to reveal a forty-inch television screen on which glowed a picture whose sharp blacks and crisp whites indicated a live pickup. The screen showed a man with a spade beard seated in a sleekly modern chair. The man wore some kind of dark velveteen lounging coat. Behind him was an oval viewport against which water lapped gently.

Commander Victor Ahab looked out from the screen and said cheerfully, "We are delighted to have both you gentlemen aboard our vessel. The craft carries a THRUSH registration number, of course, but I prefer the name *Moby Dick*. A harmless little conceit. Incidentally, I am speaking to you from my personal command post forward. You will be brought here presently. First, however, I would appreciate it, Mr. Solo—so nice to meet you at long last—if you would hand the explosive device you are carrying to the crew member who is just now coming to take it from you.,,

The aft bulkhead opened with a whirring of motorized latches. A burly THRUSH seaman in a trim black blouse and trousers entered. Overhead, men ran on the deck- plates of the sub. The atmosphere of tension heightened.

Three other seamen followed the first into the compartment. Lights came on behind concealed brackets. The seaman in the lead watched Solo's right hand and kept his distance.

"No bravado, please, Solo," Commander Ahab boomed from the screen. "You could toss the pill and blow us all up, but you would be a member of the party. Escape is impossible. There is a powerful magnet under the deck on which you are standing. Special metal plates are built into the soles of the boots you so rudely stole from one of my men. This clever little device gives us perfect control of our crew. Submarines tend to grow unstable after long undersea voyages. Well, Solo? Why do you hesitate. Run!"

Captain Ahab's voice was thick with derision. Solo slashed his free hand across his brow to clear the sweat from his eyes. He made an effort to move his right leg, then his left.

His boots were locked tight to the floor.

Still he clutched the explosive capsule, hesitating.

"The pseudo-heroics of you U.N.C.L.E. people nauseate me," Ahab said, scowling.

Illya's lips were white. "Still, Commander, we can destroy you if we choose."

Ahab reached off screen. He picked up what appeared to be a canned sardine, tipped his head back and ingested the morsel in a gulp. "Ah, Kuryakin, of course you can. But I do not believe you will. First, there is your natural instinct for self-preservation. Second, and more important, I am sure both you and Mr. Solo are intensely curious as to why we allowed you to penetrate this project base to this point.

"After all, we were reasonably certain as to who you were the moment you passed the Castle entrance booth. We have been monitoring you with concealed audio and video pickups every step of the way. We deliberately cleared the sub pen of personnel so that you would come aboard. Don't you wonder why?"

He made a flashy gesture to emphasize his rhetorical question, went on: "Of course you do! And the only way in which you can both find out is for you, Mr. Solo, to put down that wretched bomb and join me in my quarters."

Solo's fingers were slippery with perspiration. One toss of the explosive cap and that would be it. But Ahab had damnably piqued his curiosity.

Swallowing, hoping blindly that somehow he and Illya would eventually be able to negotiate a way out of this trap, Solo closed thumb and index finger around the gelcap and extended his arm to the nearest seaman.

"You win, Ahab. Your magnets and your psychology are too much."

The seaman slid his palm under Napoleon Solo's hand. Solo opened his fingers. The gelcap dropped. The other THRUSH sailors in the chamber exhaled with relief.

Solo felt the tingling stop beneath his feet. He discovered he could move his legs. Overhead feet pounded again. Men bawled orders.

"Naturally we are superior to you, Mr. Solo," Ahab said, jovial now. "For too many years, THRUSH has operated from a position of weakness. But we were bound to succeed. Our secret—THRUSH's secret, if you will—is simply this." Commander Ahab beetled his brows in a caricature of confidence. "We're only number two, Mr. Solo. We try harder."

Commander Ahab barked a command. Seamen swarmed around the pair of U.N.C.L.E. agents and marched them to the forward bulkhead. They were led through complex instrument control rooms jammed with other THRUSH sailors, who had been lurking quietly aboard while the trap was sprung.

By the time they were ushered into Commander Ahab's personal quarters at the bow of the monster submarine, a rumble of power through the hull told Illya and Solo that their fortunes had just taken another dive.

The *Moby Dick* was putting out to sea.

ACT Ill

A DROWNING DAY FOR LONDON TOWN

COMMANDER VICTOR Ahab poised the ladle over the gleaming solid silver tureen.

"More lobster Newburg, Mr. Solo?"

Napoleon Solo suppressed a shudder. He was seated opposite Commander Ahab at a good-sized dining table in the latter's quarters. To his right, Illya slouched in a chair, most of his food left untasted.

Solo felt wretched. He and Illya had been jammed into small cells overnight, unable to talk to each other, alone with their thoughts while the atomic engines of the *Moby Dick* thrummed all around them. Solo had finally managed to drift off to sleep around five in the morning. He was wakened forty- five minutes later by a siren he was sure Ahab had turned on for the sole purpose of fraying his nerves even more.

He'd been given no soap, no chance to shave. His skin felt grubby. His beard was sprouting. Commander Ahab, by contrast, was freshly tonsured, smartly attired in a white naval dress uniform with a cluster of gaudy THRUSH ribbons on the left bosom. He presided cheerfully over the breakfast table to which the U.N.C.L.E. agents had been led by guards.

"I don't think our friends care for our hospitality." said the fourth guest at the table.

"Alas, no, Cleo my sweet," said Commander Ahab, attacking a lobster claw with stainless steel crackers.

Miss Cleo St. Cloud looked quite attractive in tight-fitting gold lamé slacks and blouse. She was smoking a cigarette in a long holder and watching the captives with amusement.

Cleo sat with her back toward the sharp angle formed by the bow-plates of the gigantic sub. Looking past her shining blonde head, Solo could see two of those large, dark green viewports which revealed the churning darkness of the ocean. It was morning, but the sub was evidently so far down that sunlight could not penetrate.

"Surely you will have a spot of breakfast juice at least, Mr. Kuryakin?" Ahab asked.

Illya cocked a sour eye at a pitcher of clam broth. "I eat nothing but peanut butter and jelly in the morning, thanks all the same."

Cleo exhaled smoke. "I'd eat hearty, darlings. Especially you, Mr. Solo. Ahab has a little task in store for you this morning."

Ahab got up, wiping his lips with an oversized white napkin. He went to a chart table and consulted a large map.

"That's quite correct, Mr. Solo. We should be reaching our rendezvous point within ten minutes." He turned, rubbing his pudgy hands together. "And then—the beginning of the end for the enemies of THRUSH."

Pushing his chair back, Solo stood up, stretched. A seaman stationed near the bulkhead lifted his short-muzzled power rifle to firing position. Irritably, Solo waved him away, walked to the forward viewports. A pearl-gray fish of unusual size nosed up on the other side. It regarded Solo with a sorrowful eye, then flicked its tail and shot out of sight.

Solo said: "I don't want any fried shrimp, stewed oysters or diced eel, Ahab. But I would like some in formation."

Commander Ahab stroked his beard. "I suppose that would be in order. Appreciating the totality of our plan will heighten your feeling of dismay as we carry it out. Very well. Ask."

"First of all—" Solo gestured to the foaming sea outside "—where are we?"

"Somewhere under the North Atlantic. Exactly where needn't trouble you. Next question?" said Commander Ahab.

"What's the reason behind this elaborate floating cigar?"

Ahab chortled. "Floating cigar indeed! The *Moby Dick* has been in construction for better than three years. It is a mobile operations base from which we shall put to use certain principles of oceanographic knowledge discovered and applied by various members of the THRUSH research wing.

"Poor Dr. Shelley, by the way, apparently had done some research along parallel lines, and had also collected scraps of data which made him suspect that we were going in the same general direction. Our preliminary tests couldn't be carried out in complete secrecy, you know. We did disturb the ocean here and there. At any rate, we have perfected a means to quickly and drastically alter major ocean currents. When explosive charges are placed at the proper depths and positions on the ocean floor, and exploded simultaneously, the result is the instantaneous creation of tidal waves of staggering size and destructive power.

"The one we sent in a vain at tempt to rescue Naglesmith—he was supposed to rendezvous with the *Moby Dick*, you see—was an infant compared to the one we are preparing now."

Ahab's manner was easy and conversational but his eyes were full of the bright, fanatic glitter of the dedicated THRUSH officer determined to attack civilization at its foundations, and destroy it.

Ahab crossed the plush ivory carpet to the chart table, returning with the oceanographic map he had consulted earlier. He pointed to a number of bright red crosses on the map.

"Here, here and here our divers will plant charges necessary to create a tidal wave of such immense proportions that it can easily sweep up the Thames River and destroy all of London and the countryside round about for a radius of fifty miles. Once the charges are set, we shall sail back to England

and detonate them. When London is inundated and all its inhabitants drowned, THRUSH Central will hand a letter of ultimatum to all the major governments of the world. The letter will demand immediate surrender. This time we shall achieve our goal."

Ahab smiled good-humoredly. He was about to continue when Illya sat up. The thrumming had stopped.

Rather excitedly, Cleo St. Cloud leaned forward. "The engines are out."

"And the divers will be starting down. Well, Mr. Solo, now comes your moments of glory."

Once more Ahab tapped the chart. This time he indicated a cross that was not scarlet, but black.

"This is the reason we allowed you and Mr. Kuryakin to come aboard the *Moby Dick*. This mark. Just here, a charge must be placed—a key charge—at such a depth that the man who places it will very likely perish. Congratulations, Mr. Solo!" Ahab rolled up the chart and gestured. "You have been chosen! My men are standing by with your diving suit and the explosive package."

Solo scowled. "I didn't raise my hand, teacher."

Still grinning merrily, Ahab snapped his fingers. The seaman turned down a rheostat, plunging the chamber into semi-darkness. The only illumination was a faint phosphorescent gleam cast by the sea water lapping at the viewports.

Cleo St. Cloud picked up a small, silvered pencil-like affair. She touched a stud which started a purple bulb in the tip to winking at half-second intervals.

"Miss St. Cloud has ways of overcoming your reluctance, Mr. Solo," Ahab said. "That is why I invited her along for the voyage. Guard! Hold Mr. Kuryakin near the door so that he does not interfere."

The guard leaped forward, jammed his power-rifle into Illya's shoulder blades and jerked his head to indicate that Illya should follow. Illya tossed his napkin aside, hesitated as though ready to start swinging. Solo blinked once, very fast. Illya caught the signal, contained his anger. Solo had called the shot. They would try to ride it out a bit longer.

Illya accompanied the guard. Ahab walked around in front of Solo. "Please." He indicated an easy chair. "Be so good as to sit down."

"All of a sudden, Ahab, I'm not feeling very polite."

Ahab's face flushed. With surprising power, he jabbed his fingers hard at Solo's chest while Cleo, sneaking around from behind, shoved the chair forward so that it struck Solo's legs from behind. He sat down abruptly.

Iron bands snapped out from the body of the chair to pinion his arms and legs. He writhed, heard Ahab chuckling. The purple light floated near in the gloom.

Somewhere out beyond the blinking purple pinpoint, Cleo St. Cloud murmured, "Relax, Mr. Solo. Just let yourself relax. All we're going to do is relax you to the point where you'll be willing to follow Victor's orders through a headset."

"Your act is lousy, dear," Solo said. But he didn't feel confident. He remembered the glazed, mindless look on Illya's face in the Golder's Green lab. He braced for an ordeal.

"Cleo won't fail me," Ahab said out of the dark. "Not if she wants to see London again."

Solo's arms ached from the constriction of the steel bands. His forehead and cheeks felt clammy.

The tiny purple bulb seemed to swell in size, sending out star-like rays. Solo realized the starry effect was the result of his eyes watering. Already he was having trouble concentrating on anything except the blinking light.

Soothingly Cleo's voice reached him:

"Mr. Solo—may I call you some thing a little less formal? Napoleon. That's better. You're quite a charming man. You would do well as a member of the THRUSH team. Pity you're not with us. Still, the two of us can be friends, can't we? Nothing but trust between us, Napoleon my dear.

"Once you trust me, you'll realize that all this is for the best. You'll feel so much better if you relax and quit wrenching around in your chair that way. Victor told you the mission was dangerous, didn't he? Of course it is. But it needn't be fatal. No, not at all. Provided you obey instructions carefully, you have an excellent chance of coming out alive.

"Naturally you won't be able to obey instructions, if you continue to fight against us. You must stop fighting. You must let your muscles relax. That's the first of the important steps, my sweet Napoleon. Relax. Then sleep. *Relax and sleep*—"

Somewhere, faintly, another voice drifted. "Give her the raspberry, Napoleon."

Illya had hardly uttered the words when Solo heard a thud, a groan, a slumping sound.

"Don't let him interrupt us again," Ahab snarled.

Solo was growing drowsy. He wanted to say something to Cleo St. Cloud. Something smart; needling. Anything to show her that his mind was his own, unresponsive.

That purple light—how restful it was. Going off, then coming alight with a soft blaze, like a flower blooming in silence.

His upper arms tingled. Vaguely he sensed that Cleo St. Cloud was talking to him. Actually she hadn't stopped. It was like living in a house beside a waterfall. After five years the splash no longer bothered you. He'd been listening to Cleo for at least ten—

On and off went the purple light, blossoming, blossoming. *On and off, on and off—*

"Yes, Napoleon my dear, yes, that's it. *Relax and sleep, relax and deep—*"

A dim corner of his mind rebelled.

The purple light was soothing. But they were going to send him out into the ocean's depth to plant a bomb that would help create a tidal wave to destroy London, England. Desperately his mind tried to erect a wall against the soothing-syrup of her voice.

How many human beings in London? he asked himself with the small, still-alert part of his mind. Four million? Five? He wasn't sure. He tried to think of them as all dead. One by one he began to count macabre bodies floating over a fence.

One dead.

Two dead.

Ten dead.

Hundreds, thousands, millions dead if he let her win—

Blink blink blink went the purple light, so softly, so subtly, so treacherously.

A guttural male voice: "Is he responding?" Doggedly Solo counted corpses in his mind.

"Sssh! I think so. He's difficult. A minute longer. Then I'll have him."

He heard the rustle of her gold slacks as she eased nearer. Cool fingers tested the pulse of his left wrist. The purple light was inches from his eyes, on and off, *on and off—*

"Relax, dear sweet Napoleon. Relax, let your mind and your body respond only to me. *Relax and respond to me—*"

He'd run out of mental steam trying to count the dead bodies that would haunt him if he failed. His whole brain felt like a sponge, soaking up soothing sounds and purple lights. She had him. The whispering witch had him. *He was about to go under, he—*

Suddenly there was an absence of pressure.

She had taken her fingers from his wrist.

In the dark Napoleon Solo gambled.

He curled the fingers of his right hand under and jammed his nails into his palm as hard as he could. digging, *digging—*

Pain lanced along his nerves. He stared straight into the purple light, head lolling to one side, eyes barely open, mere slits.

Abruptly the purple light snapped out.

Footsteps moved. A man's voice. a woman's, then both, whispering together in a guarded conversation he could not hear. Sweat trickled coldly down into his collar. He kept scratching his right palm to jolt himself with fresh waves of stinging pain.

There was a whine, a snap of a switch going down. Solo didn't dare move. He tried to open his eyelids a fraction more, turned his pupils toward the sound of Ahab's heavy breathing. Amplified, a flat male voice said, "Yes, Commander?"

"Stand by with the diving gear. Mr. Solo is under control and ready to go."

Sitting heavy-lidded, Napoleon Solo stared at the carpet.

Briskly, Cleo said, "Mr. Solo, you will obey Commander Ahab's instructions and only Commander Ahab's, whether delivered in person or via a microphone and head set receiver. You will do this starting the moment I count three and clap my hands twice. Furthermore, you will be agreeable. You won't struggle or try to fight or escape." She paused. "Very well, Mr. Solo. One. Two. *Three*."

Sound of palms cracking together once, twice. Solo affected a silly smile and opened his eyes.

"I'm hungry," he said with a cheerful grin.

Commander Ahab bustled up, touched the chair's back. The steel bands retracted with spanging sounds.

"Sorry, no time for that now, Mr. Solo. We must get you into your gear and on your way."

Tractably Solo allowed himself to be led toward the entrance to the chamber. Illya Kuryakin slumped against the wall, the ugly purple bruise on his forehead showing where he had been clubbed. As Solo passed, Illya gave him a searching look. Solo raised his right hand and wriggled his fingers in the air.

"Hello there."

Illya looked ill as Solo stepped through the hatch.

Moments later Solo was shoved down a ladder into a large, steel-walled room where half a dozen THRUSH seamen manhandled him into a cumbersome diving suit. A diving helmet was lowered and dogged down. The inside of the suit smelled vaguely of fish. Solo's field of vision was restricted. THRUSH sailors crisscrossed it, carrying air hoses.

His head was jarred as the seamen jerked the helmet one way, then another, attaching the hoses. Ahab appeared. He had a combination earphone-mike on his head, the mike a tiny black sphere at the end of a curving piece of stainless steel which swept around from his ear to just in front of his lips. Ahab held up a small, flat, shallow package with a metal clip attached.

"Explosive. Very powerful, Mr. Solo." Ahab's words crackled through the diving Suit headset. "I will fasten it securely to your belt, thus."

The package was clipped in place.

"Attached to the package is a special trigger-release weight. You will have no trouble feeling the stud which activates the weight. I will tell you when to press the stud. You will be going down quite a long distance, and when you reach the proper level, we will give you further instructions.

"Follow them to the letter, Mr. Solo. The placement of this particular charge is extremely critical. An error of even a few feet could upset calculations. We trust the pressure to which you descend will not prove fatal, but if it does—ah, well, you have given your life to a good cause."

That's one cause, Solo thought as he grunted a monosyllabic reply, that won't get any help this trip.

He'd fooled them.

His right hand, inside the suit's glove, still stung. But he had managed to hold out against Cleo St. Cloud. He hoped Illya could take care of himself, escape somehow. Illya would be going it alone now. Solo knew, as he was shoved forward to an open hatch, that his trip would probably be one way.

He was going to place the explosive packet in the wrong location if it killed him. As it very likely would.

The THRUSH seamen pushed him into an oval chamber, then sealed its inner hatch. Water began to rise, foaming dark around his boots. Solo turned clumsily, noting that his air hoses were paying out through the otherwise sealed hatch running out through specially gasketed steel ring brackets.

The water rose past his faceplate. Evidently activated by the agitation of the sea water pouring in, a powerful lamp flashed on at the top of his helmet. The outer hatchway opened.

"Forward, Mr. Solo!" Ahab said in the headset. "Over the threshold and down to Davey Jones." Ahab's voice carried a malicious edge.

Manfully Solo moved ahead. Once away from the steel hull of the *Moby Dick* he dropped at a slow but steady rate. Out of the deepening watery

gloom something long, bullet-shaped, and finned flashed at him. Solo slung himself to one side.

The monster fish flashed on by, snapping its mouth shut on a disturbing display of sharp teeth. The gloom of the deeps closed around him again, shading off from purplish green to total black.

The beam of his head lamp revealed little. He had distressing visions of fanged fish hovering nearby, waiting to make a snack of him. He began whistling Minnie the Mermaid, hoping Ahab was listening.

Sure enough, he was: "The pitiful dupe! He's whistling a bawdy sea song. Cleo my dear, you gave an inspired performance."

All this was aside, not meant for Solo, who was surrounded by watery darkness and beginning to find it difficult to maintain a mood of levity. He was troubled by fear of what would happen if he failed; fear of the tremendous psychological advantage the tidal wave technique would give to THRUSH; fear, at the last, of his own death, down here in the primordial ghostliness of the sea, alone, powerless, small.

Then he began to understand Ahab's earlier remarks about the riskiness of this mission. Inside his suit, seeming to issue from behind him, he heard slight tearing sound. Slight, but loud in his ears as a butcher knife slashing canvas.

Immediately the air he was breathing seemed thinner, malodorous. He began to breathe more loudly than before. His lungs hurt.

"Solo!" Ahab said. "The pressure indicator is behaving oddly."

"Air—beginning to smell bad coming into the suit," he said in a flat voice.

Over the headset Solo heard someone in the sub say that he was nearly to demolition depth. He also caught a snatch of a sentence ending with the words pop like a balloon.

His ears had developed a ringing. Pale blue spots danced behind his eyes. Was the crushing pressure slowly ripping through the multi layered suit? He was still descending, but through total blackness, except where the headlamp speared.

The soles of his diving boots crunched against something solid. Solo bent his head downward. The spotlight illuminated a dark, wetly green rock shelf on which he had come to rest. Ahab spoke again:

"Mr. Solo, can you hear me?"

Solo grunted that he could.

"Very well. Listen carefully. You will turn to your right. Repeat, to your right. Tell me what you have executed a ninety-degree right turn."

Swallowing to drive the blue dancing spots away, Solo turned ninety degrees.

To the left.

"I've turned," he croaked. His throat felt clogged with foul air.

"Now you will walk fourteen paces straight ahead. Each pace will be measured thus. Put your right foot down. That is a pace. Move your left foot so that the heel rests against the toe of your right. That is your second pace. So on. Report as soon as you completed the maneuver."

Carefully Solo followed the instructions. He was growing dizzy and weak. Seven paces.

Eight.

Nine.

Ten—then thirteen—and fourteen.

"I've taken fourteen paces." His voice sounded rougher than ever.

"All right. Now remove the explosive packet from your waist. Report when you have done so."

Solo did.

"Now feel its left end until you have located the stud which activates the trigger-release weight." Again Solo obeyed. Mixed with his swirly-headed feeling of impending death was the knowledge that he'd foxed Commander Ahab at last, and that THRUSH's careful calculations would be thrown awry. Perhaps the tidal wave would simply spend itself in the Channel now. Solo had no way of knowing. Nor did he care. He had done all he could.

Ahab again: "Mr. Solo, on my command and not before, you will press the stud and immediately let go of the explosive packet, allowing it to sink straight down. However, before we begin that very critical operation—"

Another jagged ripping sound inside the suit. Solo barked, "Something else just gave, Ahab."

"Why, Mr. Solo, you sound concerned. Trust me. I want you to speak to a friend of yours. Mr. Kuryakin is standing at my elbow. Mr. Kuryakin, kindly describe your position to Mr. Solo."

Over the crackling connection came Illya's gloomy voice: "I'm afraid Miss St. Cloud is holding a revolver against the back of my head, Napoleon."

Deep in Solo's belly fear tightened its hold. Ahab returned:

"I cannot describe what exquisite chastisement poor Cleo will receive for bungling your hypnosis, Mr. Solo. But frankly, I am surprised at you. Did you think we would send you down there without tracking you? We have been watching you on scan scopes all the way."

His voice harshened: "I congratulate you on a most excellent job of dissembling. You fooled me, and Miss St. Cloud is going to suffer for it, I don't mind telling you. Unless you instantly turn around one hundred eighty degrees, a full turn, walk twenty-eight paces back and signal that you are in

the correct position—we are watching you, remember—I am going to have Mr. Kuryakin shot."

Numbed with a sense of failure, Solo hesitated. Blue dots danced furiously on his retinas.

Suddenly Illya shouted, "Napoleon, drop the cursed thing right there! Don't listen to—"

A thudding sound, another groan as Illya was forcibly removed from the microphone. For one moment Solo's torment was complete. Loyalty to U.N.C.L.E. fought with loyalty to his friend.

And friendship won, because there still danced in Solo's mind the crazy will-of-the-wisp hope that there might be another way. There *had* to be another way. He couldn't let Illya be killed.

Napoleon Solo turned and paced off the twenty-eight steps.

"That's a little more like it," Ahab rumbled. "The scope shows you precisely in position. Touch the stud and release the package."

With a feeling of horror Solo carried out the act. Weight was gone from his hand.

The air inside the suit was becoming unbearably foul. He was going to pass out. He took an involuntary step and nearly tumbled off the rock shelf into an abyss of water. The lurching movement produced another ripping noise, louder than the first two. Then came a loud hiss.

"By all rights," Ahab's voice boomed into his ears, "I should let you remain down there to die, Mr. Solo. But you have aroused my anger, and that is not done with impunity, I assure you.

"I think it would be more suitable if you came back aboard the *Moby Dick* and we took you to London, to be an eyewitness to your own handiwork. But that doesn't mean we can't give you a sharp lesson on your return trip. You men on the power winches! Bring him up at twice the safe speed."

Without warning Solo was jerked from overhead. He went sailing up through the dark water. He yelled a curse over the headset, but it came out a scrambled gurgle. His tongue bulged in his throat. His eyes hurt as though needles pierced them. His guts churned as the pressure decreased, decreased, too fast—

Five minutes later Solo lay on the carpet in Commander Ahab's private quarters. He writhed, arching his back and gasping for air like a beached fish. He could barely see as Ahab towered over him and delivered a vicious kick to his ribs, rolling him over and forcing a wild yell of pain out between his teeth.

Into the distorted crazy-mirror of Solo's vision Commander Ahab dragged someone else. It was Cleo St. Cloud, sobbing and mopping at her bloodied nose with a handkerchief. One eye was already darkening.

Commander Ahab knotted his fist in her hair, and shook her back and forth like a doll. He alternated this sport with a few more crashes of his boot-tip against Solo's midsection. Ahab choked: "There is only—one master aboard—the *Moby Dick*. Perhaps you have learned that—by——*now*—"

A thin line of blood dribbled out of Solo's mouth, down his chin. He felt as though his body would explode.

He'd failed.

Napoleon Solo spun off toward darkness. Before he went the whole distance, he heard a sound.

The *Moby Dick*'s atomic engines were thrumming. The sub was on its way back to England.

Solo was slipping down a long slide into the biggest dark that had ever swallowed him. In his pain-ridden mind he heard a tune, crazy, as though played on a flute.

London Bridge is falling down, falling down—drowned in ten mil lion tons of water.

Solo saw the wave rise up. It smashed against him, driving him all the way down the slide, to nothing.

Two

MISS CLEO ST. CLOUD looked bad. Displaying her black eye, plus a sticking plaster over the bridge of her nose, she sat up front beside the chauffeur in Ahab's big Daimler as it sped into London. A soupy gray dawn was breaking over the city.

The *Moby Dick* had surfaced off the coast during the night. It was met by two rubber raft-loads of THRUSH agents. Ahab's car waited on the lonely little coast road where they had landed. The *Moby Dick* slipped out to sea again, a gray-white phantom whose dim blue running lights sank under the roiled water of the Channel.

They had taken back roads to the city, Solo and Illya in the spacious tonneau with Commander Ahab beside them. Two THRUSH agents in bowlers sat on the jump seats facing them. Each held a pistol pointed at one of the U.N.C.L.E. agents.

The Daimler nosed through the thick fog, narrowly missing an on coming taxicab. The cab driver leaned on his horn. It blatted as he skidded on past them, then faded in the murk. Commander Ahab, who had been complaining of a sore throat, sprayed his palate noisily with a golden atomizer. He put the atomizer away and slapped his knee, again the soul of cheerfulness.

"Well, Mr. Solo, it won't be long now. You have quite a treat in store. The spectacle of London inundated should be thrilling, especially since we shall be observing it from an altitude of better than ten thousand feet."

Illya cocked an eyebrow. He looked paler than usual. His face was badly bruised. His thin fingers drummed against his trousers. "We're going up to watch in an airplane, are we?"

"Precisely," Ahab returned. "We'll take my private turbojet. We should arrive at the field in another twenty minutes. Allow me to bring you up to date, Mr. Solo, since you didn't regain consciousness until we were halfway to London."

Solo said nothing. His eyes were flicking right and left out the bullet proof windows. The car seemed to be rolling through some kind of district of small shops. In the fog it was hard to tell exactly. A few electric lamps burned behind smudged plate glass windows.

Solo's belly growled emptily. He ached from end to end. Now and again he experienced double vision. One rib might or might not be cracked. Ahab was leaning forward on the seat.

For no reason, he jabbed Solo in the ribs. Solo groaned, restrained an impulse to start swinging. Time was running out. Heroics would gain them nothing. One or the other of them had to escape from the car before it reached the private THRUSH airfield.

Ahab hadn't stopped speaking:

"Splendid timing, don't you think? The detonation of the underwater charges is set for 4:30 this after noon, just as the homeward rush begins. Can't you see the good burghers of London wiggling and squiggling in panic, trying to jam the tubes and the trains, when suddenly, splash!" Eyes rolling a trifle maniacally, Ahab closed his fist. "Water, water, water! It's not every day a man destroys a symbol of civilization."

Levelly Napoleon Solo said, "You, Commander, are an unspeakable maniac. Like every member of THRUSH."

The commander's upper lip began to tremble. He was on the point of striking Solo when the driver of the Daimler cursed and hit the horn. The car slewed wildly.

From a narrow, murky cross street, a dairy van had pulled out suddenly. The Daimler's brakes locked as the driver desperately tried to cut around past the van's hood. The rear tires squealed, skidding—

"Too fast!" Ahab burst out, losing control. "Too fast in this fog, you fool!"

The wrath he had been about to vent on Solo become focused on the driver, in the form of a wild, lashing blow of his fist against the back of the man's neck. From that point on the driver never had a chance.

There was a crash, a wrenching of metal, a second, louder crash, the sound of glass smashing. The Daimler's right rear end suddenly elevated. The bowler-hatted THRUSH agent on the right side of the tonneau peered out.

"Gawd 'elp us! Turned over the blinkin' milk wagon. And we're 'ung up on 'is front bumper to boot."

Commander Ahab whipped out a pistol, pressed it against Solo's side.

"Out, both of you. We'll lift the car free. Hadkins, you and Blightsome go first. Get out here on the left. And no funny business, Mr. Solo, or I'll splatter your skull all over the cobbles."

The two THRUSH agents climbed out. Then Ahab unlimbered himself. Solo watched Illya move out next. While the slender agent momentarily cut off Ahab's view, Solo quickly mouthed the single word *Go.*

Illya's eyebrows quirked as he bent to get out of the car. His expression indicated his reluctance to leave his friend. Solo repeated the single syllable silently, pushing Illya ahead of him.

A couple of curious early risers watched from down the sidewalk. Otherwise the street of shops was quiet. Quiet, that is, save for the outraged screams of the dairy van driver.

His vehicle had been turned over on its right side. Milk and cream flowed through broken glass all over the street. And from the left, upward side of the van rose the driver himself, portly, red-faced, his tweed cap askew and his wattles quivering

"Lousy stinking swells in yer big cars!" he yelled, knocking a big smear of butter off the point of his chin. "Been out all night partyin', 'ave yer? 'oo's

goin' to pay for all my goods, answer me that? You are, fuzzy-whiskers, you are!"

Under the goading of the concealed guns of Messrs. Hadkins and Blightsome, Solo and Illya were laboring to lift the right rear fender off its hang-up on the upthrust point of the van's bumper. They grunted, heaved, grunted, heaved. A bobby's whistle sounded in the fog somewhere as Ahab shouted at the truck driver, "Be quiet, you insufferable pig!"

"Pig, am I?" howled the driver. He flung a couple of pound chunks of butter at his tormentor.

At that moment Napoleon Solo lurched against the THRUSH agent named Blightsome, simultaneously heaving with all his might on the fender.

Down came the Daimler's weight, released, onto Blightsome's foot.

The man howled. Solo whirled, gut-chopped the other THRUSH agent, just as Commander Ahab lost his temper completely, pulled his pistol and shot the dairy driver in the shoulder.

Solo shoved Illya hard in the spine, turned to fend off the attack of the first THRUSH man he'd hit. Illya hesitated only an instant. He leaped up on the van, jumped down on the other side and was gone into the murk.

The first THRUSH agent smashed Solo in the nose with his gun barrel, staggering him. On his knees, Solo took another blow in the neck.

"Get after Kuryakin!" Ahab cried, apoplectic. The THRUSH gunmen hesitated. Their reason was evident. From the rear the bobby's footsteps clacked at them in a dead run.

Ahab heard this, hastily ordered them all into the Daimler as the bobby's whistle split the morning air again. Solo tried to pull away. Ahab kicked him in the leg and threw him on his face in the tonneau.

The THRUSH agents dragged Solo's legs into the car as it gathered speed, snaked around past the wrecked van and raced away into the fog.

Somewhere Ahab was cursing:

"Kuryakin's loose. Loose! Well, we can't let that stop us. Too much at stake. They'll never believe him anyway. Never in time. We'll go ahead. We must. Ah, you—causing me all this difficulty!"

He jammed his sole against Solo's head. "I should put your light out now, Solo. But you've earned a much more painful death. Besides, no matter what Kuryakin does, it won't help. Why, 4:30 will be here before they know it." Ahab began to titter, somewhat crazily.

Groggy and nauseated, Solo lay on the floorboards of the racing car. He hoped Illya would make it. He hoped something could be done in time. But he was worried that Ahab was right: Then it was already too late.

Commander Ahab settled down and, as if he needed a scapegoat for all of the things that had gone wrong, instructed his two agents to work Solo over thoroughly. They beat him with the indifference of professionals, all the way to the THRUSH airfield.

THREE

THE HANDS on the huge clock high overhead registered two in the afternoon. All around, there was an atmosphere of tension, of men finally engaged in a battle for which they had trained for years.

One entire wall of the immense chamber consisted of frosted Plexiglas panels. They were illuminated from behind. They bore on their surfaces intricate maps of various areas of the greater London area.

Small lights popped and winked over the various portions of the map like a pinball backboard gone mad. Animated arrows pointed down main thoroughfares, pulsing with light to indicate a maximum traffic flow. Underneath the great Plexiglas boards, controllers, all of them officers from the various military services of Her Majesty, sat on stools on ten-foot high

motorized platforms. They called signals through headsets and watched the changing light patterns.

This was the highly top secret Program Room from which, if the time ever came, the British could unleash nuclear devastation upon an aggressor who struck first. The room was located six levels underground. Today its occupants were engaged in a strange kind of war: a war against the hands of the master clock high above them.

The clock's hands ticked over to register two minutes past the hour.

Grimly fascinated, Illya Kuryakin watched the movement of the hands. He was seated in a comfortable easy chair, high up behind glass in the master programming booth overlooking the floor. The upholstery on Illya's chair was black, like that of the chair beside him in which Mr. Waverly sat.

Waverly's forehead was puckered. He kept tock-tocking his pipe stem against the lucite counter. To the right of the U.N.C.L.E. operatives, the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the C.I.D. sat in red-upholstered chairs, anxiously watching floor operations.

All available members of the armed forces plus the entire London police department to a man were on the streets, directing what might become the greatest mass exodus ever attempted.

Running away from Commander Ahab's car in the morning fog, an exhausted Illya had fled for several blocks before phoning a coded U.N.C.L.E. number.

Relays had switched him to Mr. Waverly. Illya reported what was likely to happen at four-thirty in the afternoon.

An official Whitehall limousine sped out of the fog ten minutes later. It carried him to No. 10 Downing Street. From that address at shortly past eleven issued the order that all resources were to be mobilized to put into effect a defense Program left over from the days when the exodus of a city's population seemed feasible in the face of nuclear attack.

By noon bayonet-armed troops were on the streets and outward traffic was flowing sluggishly. Citizens milled in panic at the tube entrances. Nearly everyone had heard the Prime Minister's emergency broadcast alluding to *a situation of grave emergency which required orderly but instant evacuation*.

For two hours now the evacuation had been in progress. Thirty-nine gigantic TV monitors positioned on the floor of the Program Room showed London's various main traffic arteries. Each road was hopelessly clogged with motionless traffic. Eleven additional monitors relayed pictures from other main points around London. A riot was in progress outside the Parliament Building, for example. The rioters were panic-stricken students who had no idea why they were rioting, or what they were protesting.

The Prime Minister himself had decided to put the evacuation plan into operation. He had digested the facts presented by his aides: only a third of the population, perhaps less, could be gotten out before the THRUSH tidal wave struck at half after the hour of four. Hardly satisfactory, but better than nothing. The Prime Minister had ordered the evacuation. And it had been a bad choice.

As Illya watched with growing horror, scenes of chaos and confusion multiplied on the monitors. Up to this point the behavior of London's population had been generally both exemplary and amazing. But now, with all roads jammed and horns blasting everywhere, and still no word from the government as to the reason for the exodus, sporadic riots of serious proportions were breaking out. Many led by howling teenagers.

"It will be less than a third surviving," Illya breathed.

Mr. Waverly heard him, said, "Very likely. Our only hope is to locate the underwater craft."

Every hunter-killer sub unit in the North Atlantic, every available NATO vessel, had joined the search, with no results thus far. Illya studied the huge clock beyond the glass. It was suspended by modernistic stainless steel rods from the arched ceiling. The hands. moved again, inexorable.

Illya thought of Solo. For the tenth time in an hour he reached out, jerked an olive-green phone off its prongs. Mr. Waverly watched, strain showing around the corners of his eyes.

Illya had difficulty hearing. There was a constant buzz of communications traffic in the booth. He said into the phone:

"Kuryakin here. You'll have to speak up."

"U.N.C.L.E. station three-a-one," replied a clipped voice. "We are getting feedback from our corps of agents covering the city. But so far we have nothing positive."

"How many private airfields can there be around London?" Illya barked.

"Enough to make investigation difficult, Kuryakin. Air traffic is at its peak, what with evacuation helicopters taking off everywhere. We also have no reliable way of monitoring flights. The THRUSH airplane you referred to may already be up, and the field which it used abandoned. Our agents are having trouble reaching outlying sections of the city at all. Reports are coming in, but it's taking time. The streets are a madhouse."

Illya's face wrenched. "I'm not interested in excuses—"

The duty officer interrupted:

"Excuse me, Kuryakin, but please remember yourself. We have no direct evidence that the THRUSH detonation signal will be given from the aircraft. And we have other assignments at a time like this, you know. Records to remove. Personnel to evacuate. Liaison with the government. I realize the life of Mr. Solo is important to you, but in time of crisis, well—"

He did not finish. Mr. Waverly extended a hand toward the phone, his expression asking, Need help? Illya shook his head. The duty officer finished: "Look, Kuryakin, I'll signal you the moment we learn anything."

"Yes. Thank you. My—apologies for blowing up."

Mr. Waverly said, "Anything promising, Mr. Kuryakin?"

Illya struck his fist against the arm of the chair. "No aircraft. No airfield. Nothing."

"At least," said Mr. Waverly quietly, "if the worst happens and Mr. Solo is not heard from again, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that his quick work made it possible for one of you to escape, and get this evacuation started."

Gloomily Illya Kuryakin turned to look at his superior.

"Yes, sir," he said. "You're correct in one way. But in another, it's not nearly enough."

To their right the sharp voice of the Minister of Defense called for sound from one of the TV monitors. Rumbling booms filled the booth, mingled with agonized screams.

A mob near the Abbey had started flinging homemade fire cocktails at the British armor. The armor commanders responded with warning blasts fired at the sky.

"Tell those jackasses to hold their fire," the Defense Minister shouted.

But somehow communications with the armored unit had broken down. The cannons continued to roar.

Illya stared numb. He swung his gaze down the line of monitors. Everywhere he saw mobs, chaos, fear.

The madness was spreading.

And again the clock hands moved.

Perhaps, Illya thought, *Napoleon was better off dead*.

ACT IV

THE HOUR OF THE HARPOON

AT THAT EXACT moment Napoleon Solo was seated in a lime-green lounge chair of infinite cost and luxury. Across from him, on a wide cove seat of identical color, Commander Ahab was relaxing with a whiskey and soda, craning for a view out the window. The jet was flying an erratic pattern at 33,000 feet. Thin clouds prevented all but an occasional flash of the city far below.

On Ahab's right hand, Cleo St. Cloud sat with her shoes kicked off. She was admiring her gold- painted toenails in an offhand way, as if she were part of a scheme to butcher millions of people nearly every day of the week.

Solo's neck was clammy with perspiration. The tightly-zipped flyer's coverall was steamy. He'd found himself dressed in this garment upon awakening around noon.

"Wish we could see a bit more," Ahab commented. "Of course it may clear by signal time."

Cleo St. Cloud sniffed. "I hope some silly RAF pilot doesn't bang into us, Victor."

Ahab said, "Yes, there are quite a few planes up. Poor nitwits. Trying to evacuate the entire city of London." He glanced across at Solo. "That must be Kuryakin's work, eh?"

Solo simply shrugged.

Ever since he wakened in a plain-walled room, his mind had been clicking frantically, hunting for a way to stop the devastation that would descend upon London in a roaring, gigantic wall of water.

Commander Ahab and his cohorts had managed to elude discovery because of the unique location of their airfield. It consisted of the top three floors of a grimy warehouse covering an entire city block. Long out of business, the warehouse displayed boards where window glass had once let in sunlight.

The floors of the top two stories had been removed, providing a chamber the size of a hangar. Into this Solo was led shortly after waking up. He boarded the aircraft, a stub-winged plane with a cluster of jetpods aft and a rotor-like arrangement on top, just behind the cock pit.

From the window of the lushly appointed interior, Napoleon Solo watched the motorized roof of the ancient building roll back. Commander Ahab, already aboard, discoursed on the marvels of THRUSH, particularly the development of a vertical takeoff aircraft no larger than the conventional business or private jet.

Straight up past the rolled-back roof the sleek plane shot, straight up into thin clouds. Then the aft jet cluster took over, thrusting them forward in a normal flight attitude.

They'd been aloft for a little less than two hours now. Solo had consumed two cups of tepid tea and munched one damp, leftover cruller served by the plane's steward, a THRUSH thug with a butler's striped vest which barely concealed the pistol in the waistband of his pants. This worthy was currently guarding the entrance to the cockpit, a few paces behind where Solo was seated.

The two other THRUSH minions, Hadkins and Blightsome, relaxed in another cove-shaped lounge at the rear of the cabin. Hadkins had his gun in his lap. He was reading an illustrated motor sport publication. Blightsome, however, had done nothing but glare at Solo all the time they'd been in the air. Blightsome's foot was a clump of white bandages, the result of Solo letting the Daimler fall on it that morning. Blightsome never let go of the butt of his pistol.

Now and then he gave Solo a humorless smirk to indicate that he was just waiting for his opportunity to enjoy a bit of revenge.

Three against one, even counting out Commander Ahab and Cleo.

Upon awakening Solo had also searched for his pocket communicator. Apparently they'd taken it from him while putting him into the flyer's coverall. He had to make a move somehow. And soon.

"I wonder—" Solo began. "My throat's getting dry."

Ahab clapped his pudgy hands. "Feeling the effects of tension at last, eh? Splendid, splendid! You U.N.C.L.E. types usually try to pretend you're constructed of stone."

Solo fixed a discouraged expression on his face. "I have a right to be tense. We've lost."

"Quite right," Ahab agreed. "Most gracious of you to admit it." He summoned the combination thug and galley attendant. "More tea for Mr. Solo, Thrasher."

"Hot this time, if you don't mind," Solo said. Now that he had decided to act, take a chance no matter how rash it might be, he felt a bit of his old aplomb returning. "The last two pots were about the same temperature as a retired vegetarian's showerbath."

Grunting at the insult, the galley man retreated behind a curtain. Solo heard the pop of a gas ring being lighted.

Pointedly, Solo stared again at the expensively veneered console panel which divided the cove seat across from him. The closed cover concealed the console's contents from view. Solo kept staring. Finally Ahab noticed.

With a flourish he touched a button. The console's lid snapped all the way back into the depths of the lounge seat, revealing a double row of bright-colored studs. Ahab's eyes sparked with pride as he waggled his fingers at .the control board.

"You've guessed, haven't you, Solo? Yes, this is the center from which I shall consummate Project Ahab. However, lest you get overly ambitious, hoping to jump over here and throw several of these controls to upset things —" Ahab paused significantly. "Blightsome? Come up here, please, and keep Mr. Solo covered at close range."

The Thrushman with the round lump of bandage on his foot limped up the aisle. The private plane's jets whispered eerily. Rags of thin cloud slipped

past the fuselage.

Ahab indicated a large yellow button on the console.

"This is the control which will raise the curtain on our aquatic novelty act, Mr. Solo."

Solo eyed the malevolent-looking yellow thing. "How does it work?

"It broadcasts a signal on a frequency which is eventually picked up under the North Sea. In the event something should happen to me—a foolish attack on your part which would result in temporary struggle before Blightsome shot you—"

"The signal is so arranged that it is automatically relayed through the master control board of the *Moby Dick* cruising somewhere to the north of England. Thus the temporary commander aboard the sub can detonate the explosives also. By the same token, should something happen to his craft, and the charge fail to detonate because the sub and its relays were out of action, I have merely to set this—"

He indicated a purple button.

"—and we recycle for direct signal from our plane to the explosives. No middleman, so to speak. In addition—"

A bright blue button.

"—we have controls to abort the *Moby Dick* in its entirety—blow it up. And also—"

A black one.

"—to do the same to this aircraft. A whole range of checks and balances, you might say."

Solo licked his lips, staring at the controls just a short distance away from him. He realized it was a temporary checkmate. Commander Ahab's black

eyes were slitted down, all humor gone. The THRUSH chief watched him speculatively.

Ahab wanted him to try for the control panel. Actually expected him to do so. Ten seconds ago, Solo had planned to do exactly that. He discarded the plan.

With a swirl of curtain, the THRUSH man appeared from the galley, carrying a silver serving tray. Blightsome reached across the aisle. He dragged a low taboret over between himself and Solo. The galleyman put down the tray. Solo picked up his cup.

The surly man took the teapot and begun to pour.

As the dark, rich liquid fell in a stream into the cup, the THRUSH agent managed to spill some of it onto the back of Solo's hand. It scalded.

"Hope it's warm enough for you," the man grunted, hardly able to conceal a snicker.

Solo's skin hurt ferociously. He was having trouble holding the cup. Ahab was peering out the window at the clouds again. The cup jiggled in Solo's hand. In that split second he realized that the THRUSH galleyman's deliberate ploy of burning him gave him the perfect opening.

He swallowed once, said a mental farewell to all the thousands of pretty girls in the world he'd never gotten around to meeting or kissing, and upset the teacup straight into Blightsome's face.

"Too blasted hot—" Solo yelled like a man confused. It was an act, a cover, misdirection. He dropped the cup and grabbed for Blightsome's gun, got it away from the startled, cursing man.

Solo used his knee to lift the taboret and tip it over with a clatter. The noise made the galleyman leap back in alarm. Commander Ahab was using both hands to shut the console cover, evidently believing Solo would go right for it.

Instead Solo jumped up, bashed the stumbling galleyman across the nose with the gun to drive him out of the way. He seized Cleo St. Cloud's wrist. "Sweetheart, it's time for you on stage again."

He thrust her forward. Squealing and clawing at him, she presented quite an obstacle to progress. But he managed to slide the cockpit door aside by reaching around her.

Inside the cockpit the pilot kept on the controls, while the co-pilot snaked a gun out of his harness. Solo shot fast. The man doubled forward, retching, a dark hole in his right cheek.

Behind him as he crowded through the cockpit door, Solo heard confused scrambling, profanity. He spun, starting to slide the cockpit door shut. He had a fragmented picture of Blightsome lurching in the aisle, face dripping scalding tea as he leveled his pistol. Solo was a fraction faster. His bullet took Blightsome in the middle and sent him rubber-legged and dying all the way back along the aisle to the plane's rear.

The slamming cockpit door muted Ahab's enraged bellows. Solo shoved past Cleo, moved to the right, out of the line of fire. To the pilot, a pasty-faced young man with fantastic eyes, he said, "Take this plane down. Land at the nearest airfield."

Carefully the pilot licked his lips. "No."

Solo had banked on this. "Take us down or I'll kill you where you sit."

"Shoot me," the pilot replied. "I refuse to obey your orders."

Distraught and sobbing, Cleo squealed again as Solo caught her wrist, dragged her forward to where the pilot could see her from the corner of his eye.

"This is Miss St. Cloud." Solo's lips were peeled back in an ungentlemanly expression. "She's Commander Ahab's little friend. Your commander grows very angry and does nasty things to people who damage his possessions."

The dart struck. The pilot's right cheek showed a muscular tic. Apparently he knew of Ahab's potential for wrath. Solo pressed on:

"Commander Ahab will do something very nasty to you, my friend, if I shoot Miss St. Cloud through the head. Which is exactly what I'm going to do unless this plane starts losing altitude."

Fear, uncertainty glittered in the pilot's eyes. Struggling, Cleo St. Cloud burst out, "It's a rotten bluff. Don't listen! An U.N.C.L.E. agent would never kill a woman—"

Wiggling his left hand around her head and down over her mouth, Solo managed to silence her. Cleo began gnawing on his fingers with considerable savagery. Solo tried to ignore this minor distraction and concentrated on the pilot. The man's cheeks were filmed with sweat as he tried to weigh his duty to THRUSH against his personal well-being, should his decision turn out to be responsible for the girl's sudden demise.

Solo had to keep the man from thinking too much. So he shouted at him: "Start this plane down right away or she gets it! Bam, *bam*!"

That jarred the man's nerve sufficiently. He took a deep breath, grasped the control wheel more firmly, inched it forward. The nose of the sleek jet began to drop into the tattered cloud. Solo took time to gulp a deep breath of air.

It was his only respite. With a horrendous jerk, the nose of the plane came up again. The pilot goggled. He hadn't moved the controls. Then understanding dawned. He tittered.

"Override controls in the rear," he said. "I forgot them. Commander Ahab is flying the plane. I can do nothing."

Desperately, Napoleon whirled around. He shoved Cleo St. Cloud out of the way, rolled back the cockpit door. A bullet chopped wood paneling out of the wall inches from his face as he dodged back. One glimpse had been enough.

The galleyman, not Ahab, was flying the plane. He was using a set of controls which were mounted to a pedestal that had apparently sprung up through the floor near the cove seat. Crouched beside him was Hadkins, the other THRUSH agent with the bowler. Hadkins' gun was trained on the cockpit. He had fired a moment ago.

The pilot yelled in terror. Solo craned around the door's edge once more, triggered a shot. Hadkins uttered a low shriek, spilled over' on his side. The galleyman, alone, turned white with fright as he held onto the auxiliary control wheel mounted in the pedestal. The air craft had leveled out but was bumping along somewhat erratically.

And where was Commander Ahab? Napoleon Solo couldn't see him anywhere in the rear compartment.

The galleyman kept one hand on the controls and reached for Hadkins' fallen gun with the other. Solo stepped through the cockpit door, wigwagged his gun muzzle.

"Both hands on the controls, please," he said.

The galleyman lifted his right hand back and fastened it on the auxiliary wheel.

Quickly Solo glided down the aisle. He stopped opposite the cove lounge seat. He kicked the top of the console with his heel. The lid snapped back. Then Solo moved to his right one pace. He jammed the muzzle of his gun down on the bright blue button and pushed.

Somewhere on the surface of the North Sea Solo imagined a tremendous mushroom gout of water, flame, thunder and spray as the THRUSH submarine blew up. "So long, *Moby Dick*," he breathed.

"A foolish gesture," said a voice in the rear. "Don't lift the gun!"

Solo kept the muzzle down hard on the blue button. Commander Ahab had thrown back the curtain surrounding the galley where he'd been hiding. He menaced Solo with a pistol. White straps crisscrossed his chest. He wore a

parachute pack over his hastily-donned overcoat. His cheeks puffed in and out with rage.

"You have cost us billions of dollars, Mr. Solo. Billions!" Spittle streaked out with the words. "But your cheap little act of bravado cost you a moment's advantage—and that is what will lose the game for you and win it for us."

Ahab lashed out with his right foot. His toe hit some kind of electric control plate set low in the galley's outer door. Four explosive bolts popped. The door fell off and disappeared, tumbling down the sky.

Wind howled into the cabin as Ahab screamed, "There is another detonation device somewhere in London, Mr. Solo. It's in a place you could not possibly find in the time left. But I will reach it. I must, for THRUSH, even though I will drown with the rest of them. Good- by, Solo. I won't kill you because I want you to be alive at four-thirty for the last trick. Mine—"

Ahab whirled and plunged through the door.

Solo darted around the terrified galleyman, battered by the wind pouring into the cabin. He hung precariously in the galley's open door, looking below. A white circle bloomed just above heavy clouds, sank swiftly into them. He heard a brittle laugh, whirled.

Cleo St. Cloud stood in the aisle, clutching her midsection. A random patch of gray light from one of the windows caught her gold wristwatch and made it glitter. Her makeup was smeared. Rather blearily, she laughed again.

"I haven't got a parachute, Solo," she said. "But I wouldn't be any good playing prisoner the rest of my life, anyway. We all carry these, you know." She lifted her watch hand, tapped the crystal which flew back to reveal a small empty compartment "One pill each. I just took mine."

Raging, Solo ran forward, grabbed her arm. "Where is Ahab's detonator located in London?"

Cleo St. Cloud's face was rapidly draining of color. She wasn't faking. She had taken something.

"Good luck, dear man from U.N.C.L.E. You'll never find it—"

"But you know where it is?"

"Of course I do. Of course I know where—"

She clutched her midriff, choking. She fell onto one knee, gave Solo a last, twisted smile and flopped over.

The pilot was standing up in the cockpit, peering out, bewildered. The galleyman had raised his hands in the air. Apparently he didn't mind capture. With a start Solo remembered that no one was flying the aircraft. It began a sickening nosedive just at that moment. Walking forward, he aimed his pistol at the pilot. Solo's face looked haggard, skull-like. He pointed the pistol right between the pilot's feverishly watering eyes and said:

"Land this plane. And get on the radio and call London airport. There'll be a lot of traffic on the bands if they're trying to evacuate. But you get through. When you do, I'll give you a relay frequency. We're going to contact a man named Waverly. We're going to get an emergency medical team to stand by at the airport, no matter what effort it costs."

Solo's voice was ragged, spilling out the plan even as he thought of it. "If any one of those things fail to happen because you caused trouble, you will be dead. Are you clear on all that?"

A sickening whine of jets as the plane continued its downward plunge. For one awful moment, fanaticism flared in the pilot's eyes. Then self-interest burned it out.

"Yes, sir."

He stumbled back to his seat.

The plane slowly pulled out of its dive. Kneeling, Solo placed his cheek next to Cleo St. Cloud's lips.

Warmth. He felt thin warmth. He was fighting the race of poison through her bloodstream.

But he was cutting it close, very fine and close. He shuddered at the price of failure.

Stumbling up to the cockpit, he saw London boom for below as they cut through the lower layers of cloud. The radio was rattling with confused voices.

"I'm trying to get through," the pilot said. He sounded a trifle desperate.

"Give me the mike." Solo grabbed it.

Three minutes later, the tricycle landing gears of the jet bumped the London airport.

Solo scanned the area. He saw the incredible pileup of cars and pedestrians on the roads at the airport's edge. He'd relayed his message to Waverly in the war room of the British government. A first-aid team had been answering a fire call less than a mile away, and was on its way to the airport now.

The pilot brought the plane to a stop and turned off the engines. Tears of disappointment leaked down his cheeks. Through the cockpit window Solo saw a cross-marked ambulance streaking to ward them.

With heavy steps he walked into the plane's rear to see whether Cleo St. Cloud were still alive.

TWO

OFF IN THE darkness of the empty hangar, a portable generator whined and hummed.

It was a serve-wracking sound, somehow. Counterpointing it rose a frantic squawk of auto and lorry horns from beyond the concrete walls. Barely

perceptible was a sustained roar which Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin knew to be the voices of Londoners fleeing in mobs along the public roadways nearby.

The pair of U.N.C.L.E. doctors had flown in moments ago in a helicopter parked on the roof of the hangar. Illya had been with them. They had joined the first-aid team in setting up an impromptu operating table made of old crates. Portable lights hooked to the generator had been hastily rigged, while two members of the first aid team pumped Cleo St. Cloud's stomach. After a swift examination, one of the U.N.C.L.E. physicians had confided to Solo and Illya that it was going to be a near thing.

A solution bottle hung upside down on a hangar stand. Through the flexible tubing attached to the bottle, near-colorless liquid dripped down into a needle taped to Cleo's left arm. Second by second the truth drug flowed into her.

Gritty-eyed and exhausted, Solo consulted his watch. Twenty-eight past three.

One of the U.N.C.L.E. doctors approached the agents.

"I think we're ready."

"Will she respond?" Illya asked. "If we make a single mistake at this point —"

The physician glowered. "Mr. Kuryakin, I can't guarantee results. That young woman was nearly dead when we started on her. Right now we stand an even chance, no better. The strain of an interrogation under drugs may be just enough to tip the scales. She could go instantly."

The two agents and the doctor started toward the circle of light. In its center, Cleo St. Cloud lay, surgical sheets hastily spread over the packing cases. Her cheeks were the color of putty. She hardly seemed to breathe. Solo knelt beside her, placed his face close to hers.

"Cleo," he said with soft intensity. "Listen, Cleo. I am a courier from THRUSH Central. I have an emergency message for Commander Ahab. I must reach him, wherever he is in London. You've got to tell me where he is so I can deliver the message."

Seconds ticked by. Cleo St. Cloud's lips trembled. She uttered a light groan.

Then her face seemed to contort, as if she were feeling great pain.

The words leaked out in a whisper:

"THRUSH Central? Message for—message for—"

Her head lolled to the side.

Solo glanced up, alarmed. One of the doctors said, "She's fighting you. It's her training."

"Cleo?" Solo began again. "It's all right. You won't be violating any confidence. I'm working for THRUSH. You must tell me where I can find Commander Ahab."

Once more the strained, light shuddering from the girl: "No. No, mustn't. Against orders—"

Frustrated, Solo stifled a curse. One of the doctors was keeping his fingers on Cleo's pulse. He glanced at Solo apprehensively. "The strain's starting to tell."

Standing a few feet back near the periphery of the light, Illya watched Solo anxiously. Solo bent near the girl again, wiping perspiration from his nose. In Illya's right pocket a low, sustained beeping began. He pulled out the rod-shaped pocket communicator, twisted the three-part barrel to align the markings, whispered into the top end of the small rod: "Channel D is open."

Mr. Alexander Waverly's voice crackled faintly: "What progress, if any, are you making, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"This is the critical moment, sir. So far she's refused to reveal the whereabouts of the detonator station."

"Let me know the moment you have something to report," Waverly replied. "The Prime Minister is ready to call off the entire evacuation, tidal waves or not. The city is in total chaos. Casualties are mounting too fast to be tolerated, and no one's getting out because the roadways are so clogged.

"You and Solo must locate Ahab and give me word that you have. There must be no tidal wave set off. But there must be an end to the evacuation within an hour as well, or the results will be nearly as bad as if THRUSH had accomplished its goal in the first place."

Mr. Waverly paused, lowered his voice: "I am relaying the Prime Minister's sentiments, Mr. Kuryakin. He is near the breaking point. I realize the situation facing you and Mr. Solo. You must come through. Else London is lost."

"But sir," Illya said. "If Miss St. Cloud won't give us the information—"

Waverly interrupted: "We are counting on you, Kuryakin."

With a feeling of complete dismay Illya looked again at Solo, kneeling by the jerry-rigged operating table. Cleo St. Cloud's head was moving slightly back and forth, in negation. Solo raked his fingers through his hair. Illya said: "Yes, sir. I understand. Out."

He replaced the communicator in his pocket. He walked forward into the light. Wearily Solo stood up.

"You'll have to increase the medication," Solo said to the doctors.

"Extremely risky," one of them replied. "You may lose her altogether."

"We're not getting anything now. Do it!"

Frowning, the doctor moved to the suspended bottle and unfastened a pinch clamp. The Pentothal dripped along the tube at a faster rate. Solo waited two minutes, then tried again:

"Miss St. Cloud—Cleo. Listen. THRUSH Central is going to be very angry with you. THRUSH Central—very angry." He repeated it a little more loudly. "Where is Commander Ahab? Tell me or you'll face disciplinary action. Tell me where to find Victor Ahab."

Again the girl shuddered. Her lips formed a word: "Sub—" She repeated it: "Sub—"

Illya's nerves broke. "It's no good, Napoleon. Ahab isn't on the sub."

"Quiet!" Solo's face was a mask of anxiety. "She's still talking."

In the silent, sepulchral gloom of the huge hangar, Cleo St. Cloud groaned and repeated: "Sub—sublevel. Second down from the street. Parchley—" Another violent shudder shook her body. "Parchley Machining Company." Suddenly her face wrenched into lines of anguish. "Now I've—told you. Don't discipline me. Don't hurt me—"

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin were running for the iron stairs which led up to the door that opened onto the roof landing plat form.

As they clattered up the metal risers Solo said, "We can get the coordinates of the Parchley Machining Company from Waverly."

Illya pulled the door open. They were blasted by wind from the revolving rotors of the U.N.C.L.E. 'copter standing on the concrete pad. Illya raced for the open hatch. Solo paused a moment in the doorway, looked down into the interior of the hangar.

The physicians and the unconscious Cleo resembled doll figures far below. Solo had never imagined that he'd be thanking a THRUSH agent for anything, yet he was doing it silently now.

He hoped he hadn't killed her.

Solo ran for the 'copter, jumped inside, slammed the hatch and watched the London airfield fail away beneath them.

THREE

TWELVE MINUTES later the 'copter swooped low along a grimy street in an industrial section of the city.

In the street, a mob surged along underneath them. Poor people, men, women, even children. There were a few pistols in the crowd, one rifle. It spat at them as the 'copter pilot jockeyed the craft toward the roof coping of the shabby brick building with the single word PARCHLEY painted on its exterior.

Napoleon Solo dodged back from the open hatch as another rifle bullet tore a hole in the 'copter's skin inches from his head. Curses, howls of rage rose from the mob below. The faces turned up at them were full of hate because the 'copter represented a means of escape.

Another bullet smacked into the craft, starring the window on the pilot's side. He jerked back instinctively. The 'copter lurched. Its skids scraped the roof coping. The pilot fought for control, got the craft again. The roof was six feet below. Solo took a grip n his pistol and jumped.

Illya landed a second later, scrambled to his feet. The clouds had broken up somewhat. The air was clearing. It promised to be a sparkling late afternoon. A beautiful afternoon for millions of people to die, either under a crushing wave of water, or tearing at each other in their blind urge to escape what ever unknown fate menaced them. There was no time to think more about it.

Solo's shadow ran out ahead of him as he raced for the roof door. Without looking at his watch, he knew it was almost four. Breathing hard, he took the short flight of steps down to the top story of the building. Illya was right behind.

They ran along past large bays, where engineer's drawing boards stood unattended under weak fluorescent lights. There was an elevator at the hall's end. Solo and Illya waited for tense seconds while the cage rose from the main floor.

Solo indicated the call board above the doors. "The second sublevel is the bottom one."

"No telling whether Ahab has any helpers with him," Illya re plied.

"I'm only concerned that Cleo was telling the truth."

Illya's brow hooked up. "You don't possibly suspect—"

"THRUSH has brainwashed its people with false information before."

The doors clanged open. Soon they were being carried downward. Solo let out a deep breath, leaned against the pale tan wall of the elevator.

"Whichever way it turns out, Illya, we gave them a good run for it."

"I would just as soon survive to enter next week's track meet," Illya replied.

Solo's stomach jumped a little as the cage stopped suddenly. The moment the doors opened he and Illya plunged straight ahead into a shadowy basement. Solo dodged to the left, Illya to the right, out of the bar of light spilling from the elevator. Solo crouched down be hind some sort of power lathe.

Across the aisle Illya was in position behind the first of a series of bins which contained long tubes of aluminum or some other light alloy. Several hundred tubes of a standard diameter stuck up from each bin..

Cautiously Solo poked his head out from behind the lathe's legs.

Fire and smoke stitched their way thunderously from the far end of the aisle. Before jerking back

Solo had a quick glimpse of Commander Ahab, his clothing rumpled, shooting at them with a powerful snooper-scope machine rifle.

More slugs thundered, ripping up clouds of dust and stone chips from the concrete floor. In the echoing silence following the thunderous bursts, Napoleon Solo peered out again.

He no longer saw Commander Ahab down there. At the end of the aisle, he saw only a large metal control board with dials and blinking lights. The board was mounted in a recessed section of the cinder block subbasement wall. Ahab had been standing in front of this board shooting at them. Now he had disappeared.

Solo cleared his throat. "Commander?" he called, The syllables bounced, echoed: *Commander Commander Commander Commander*—?

At length, the booming reply, "Yes, Solo. I'm here."

"There are two of us," Illya called. "Better give up."

Floating at them, Ahab's laughter was maniacal. "Ah, gentlemen, but I am closer to the control board than you. And while it's true that you have found me, my nearness to the board dictates that I set Project Ahab in motion. A bit ahead of schedule, perhaps. But the effect will be the same.

"Come try to take me if you wish. I shall throw that large white toggle in the center of the board—I'm sure you can see it—before you reach me."

Now Solo's belly was churning. He glanced at Illya, bobbed his head toward the board at the aisle's end. Illya caught the signal. Both U.N.C.L.E. agents leaped up and started a wild headlong charge down the aisle to try and close the distance between themselves and the large white switch which loomed from the middle of the board.

Ahab's bearded face and torso popped up above the last lathe on the left. The machine-rifle cradled against his side bucked. Orange-yellow spurts of flame leaped from the muzzle. Illya cried out, spun on suddenly boneless legs, fell.

The slugs from Ahab's weapon blasted pits in the cement near Solo's feet as he shoved his friend out of the line of fire behind one of the tubing storage bins. He crouched over Illya, made a hasty examination. Illya had taken a bullet in his left rib cage, low and near the waist. He was breathing lightly.

"Where are you, my dear friends?" Commander Ahab boomed. "This is the most unseemly show of hesitation. Or have the odds been reduced? Is Mr. Kuryakin dead? Perhaps I'll wait a moment longer to throw the switch. After all, it's only a foot or so away. Perhaps I'll wait for you to try again, Mr. Solo. You are going to try, aren't you? It's your duty—"

Stung past reason by the mocking voice, Napoleon Solo leaped up and charged.

He fired to cover himself as he ran. Ahab had changed positions, was now hiding behind the last of the tube storage bins on the right side of the aisle. He popped into sight, hair disarrayed, face grotesque with laughter, the machine-rifle spitting. In mid-stride Solo felt a bullet slam into his left thigh.

He stumbled, hurled himself to the right. Off balance, he let his gun slip. It skittered and slid out of reach. Trying to right himself, he reached desperately for something to hang onto. His hands caught some of the metal tubes in the nearest bin. Then his weight carried him down, pulling over the entire bin.

With a monstrous clanging, the tubes clattered over on him, six- foot lengths that smacked his head with painful force. He sprawled behind the overturned storage bin which had fallen athwart the aisle. He could no longer see anything at the aisle's end.

His leg was bloody. He was growing dizzy. He moved slightly, rolled onto his side. His movements dislodged some of the tubing, which clanked and clanged. Commander Ahab's voice boomed in the hollowness:

"Both of you out of action, eh? Splendid! I—" Ahab coughed. Shaking his head to clear it, Solo realized his adversary sounded weaker. "I fear one of your bullets made the mark, Mr. Solo. Fatal, perhaps. I—" Another wracking spasm of coughs. "I don't know. Yet I remain closer to the board than you. I think the time has come for me to—stop taking unnecessary risks. Listen carefully, Mr. Solo. You will hear a slight hum—when the toggle makes—contact. That way you will know the undersea charges—have been detonated—"

Hurting, dizzy, Solo realized he had only seconds left. From far away came the scrape and shuffle of a wounded Commander Ahab dragging his bulk toward the control board. Solo's gun was lost in the darkness. The only weapons he had were his hands. But if he leaped over the storage bin, he would never close the distance between himself and Ahab in time.

As he scrambled around to brace himself so that he could stand up, Solo's palm slid across one of the light alloy tubes.

From the aisle's end came a stifled curse. Then the sound of a heavy body falling. Ahab had taken a tumble.

Napoleon Solo calculated his last thousand-to-one chance—and acted.

He took hold of the alloy tube and dragged himself swiftly across the aisle to the leg of the power lathe. Reaching up, he flicked the switch.

He shoved the end of the alloy tube up against the suddenly-revolving wheel nearest him. The tube whined and vibrated. Blue sparks spat and flew. The tube's metal heated in his hands.

Solo jerked the tube back, pulled himself to his feet. He saw Commander Ahab outlined against the control board. Ahab recognized what Solo had in his hands. An expression of comprehension blended with fear on his face. He dropped his machine rifle, turned to face the board. Solo saw the blackish stain low down near the base of Ahab's spine where the bullet had caught him.

With a faltering hand Commander Ahab reached for the white switch—

With all the strength he had left, Napoleon Solo hauled back his right arm and flung the alloy tube whose end had been ripped by the lathe into a javelin-jagged point. Ahab's fingers touched the switch. The sharpened tube drove full force into the center of his back.

Ahab shrieked. He clawed at the switch. Solo watched, horrorstruck. If Ahab managed to seize the vital toggle in his last death spasms—

The commander's fingers slid away, leaving the switch unthrown. He turned awkwardly, peering up the aisle toward his slayer. Then, with a last bellow of pain, he sank down like a harpooned whale.

Feebly Solo limped back to Illya, found his communicator and called Channel D.

FOUR

THE HUGE TRANS-OCEANIC jet for New York lifted from the London airfield. Napoleon Solo sat by the window, staring out.

The city was not a pleasant sight. Even forty-eight hours after the Prime Minister had called an end to the evacuation at 4:24 P.M. that fatal afternoon, fires still burned. Smoky pillars climbed into the bright afternoon sky. The streets were being patrolled by units of the British Army, plus additional NATO forces rushed in by airlift.

The casualty toll, while not nearly as high as it would have been if Project Ahab had been a success, was still unpleasant. Solo tried to shut it all out of his mind.

The only compensation in the whole affair was the recovery of Cleo St. Cloud. In return for a lightened sentence, she had offered to work for U.N.C.L.E. when she got out of the hospital. She could be valuable in training U.N.C.L.E. agents in advanced hypnotic techniques.

The jet continued its climb toward the setting sun. Solo glanced at Illya Kuryakin sitting next to him. To Solo's surprise, Illya had taken a book out of his attaché case and was engrossed. He still looked pale, and heavier than usual due to the layers of bandage beneath his shirt.

"What's that you're reading?" Solo asked.

"Oh, something I picked up at a book store before we left," Illya replied. He flipped to the title page, pointed. "The Psychomilitary Uses of Medical Hypnosis. As someone once remarked, if you can't beat them, join them."

Seated across the aisle, Mr. Alexander Waverly pinched the bridge of his nose and looked unhappy.

"Put it away, Mr. Kuryakin," he said. "Put it away."

"But sir, it contains valuable information which we could profitably—"

"Not now, Mr. Kuryakin," Waverly said. "In New York, all right. But not now. Can't you occupy yourself with something that doesn't call up distressing memories?"

Suddenly Napoleon Solo grinned. The trim and most attractive stewardess was moving along the cabin aisle, speaking to various passengers.

"I can," Solo said, and rang the bell to call her.